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WHITEFRIARS

EMMA ROBINSON

EDITOR'S NOTE

Little is known about the life of Miss Emma Robinson, the gifted authoress of *Whitefriars*, so closely did she maintain her anonymity. That she was of a very independent spirit, however, is evident from the note of defiance which appears on the title-page of *Whitehall*, her second historical romance. "I owe thee nothing, reader," so the note runs; "I look for no favour at thy hands. I am independent; I fear nothing."

The preface to *Whitehall*, purporting to be written by an old German professor, tells of his meeting with a certain stranger, who, after discussing with him "that most admirable work, the so-called *Romance of Whitefriars*," made the following remarkable disclosure, under the genial influence of hock. Being once in London and importuned by a flower-girl to buy nosegays, he observed round the stalks of the flowers paper wrappings consisting of "MS. written in a very curious ancient caligraphy." His interest was aroused, and he succeeded in purchasing from the girl's sweetheart a whole barrow-load of similar sheets.

This mass of manuscript proved to have been written during the reigns of Charles I. and II., and to be of such an entertaining nature that the story *Whitefriars* had already been extracted and published anonymously by the stranger. *Whitehall* was the result of a further selection from the mysterious manuscript.

Whitefriars was first published in 1844.

WHITEFRIARS

OR

THE DAYS OF CHARLES THE SECOND

BY

EMMA ROBINSON

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WHITEFRIARS

CHAPTER I

THE TOWER

It was drawing nigh sunset on the eve of September 1st, A.D. 1666, a date of terrible omen to the great city within whose walls the opening events of our history took place. London lay bathed in a glorious autumnal sun, and was sinking into that busy tranquillity which marks the close of labour in the great hives of human industry. Shops were closing in all security, the burgher's early supper smoked on the table, the watch set their rounds on the city walls, and gamesome 'prentices sallied forth on their evening recreations.

The river presented an aspect of peculiar tranquillity. It was the eve preceding the Sabbath, a day held scrupulously sacred by the great mass of the people, which was still puritan. The immense fleet of merchantmen from every nation stretched along the river; the barges and gilded wherries of the citizens, decorated with streamers and flags, were drawn up along the quays and wharves, as if they, too, had a right to their seventh day's rest.

The grey ramparts and turrets of the Tower were lighted up with Italian brilliancy in the rich colours of the sunset, and were decked out in holiday splendour with innumerable banderols, above which floated, on the highest tower, the gorgeous banner of England. The great bell, which usually summoned the inhabitants within the fortress limits before the gates closed, was tolling, and divers belated persons were hurrying towards them.

Among these, riding at a jaded pace, appeared a solitary horseman. He was mounted on a powerful nag, whose original colour was probably white, but it was at present a dirty brown, and splashed and travel-stained from head to heel. The harness was strong and heavy, according

to the fashion of the period, and the rider was a tall well-made man, who wore a high hat with feathers, a travelling-cloak of scarlet, and huge jack-boots with long spurs. His under-dress, which seemed a sort of livery of orange-coloured cloth, slashed with silver, was visible, from the mantle having slipped off his left shoulder, as if to cover a kind of bundle which he carried. A pair of very large pistols, or rather blunderbusses, decked his holsters—ornaments by no means superfluous in that enterprising age, when so many "gentlemen" picked up a livelihood as *attorneys-errant*. In fact, the whole appearance of the rider was that of a dashing retainer to some noble house, only he wore no badge, and that part of the breast which is usually so decked, was patched over with new velvet. Still his air was so jaunty and bold, that the warder whom he addressed at the postern respectfully sank his partisan.

"Hollo, brother! canst tell me if Master Lieutenant be in the Tower; and if so, where a man must seek who hath affair with him?"

"Art from over sea? methinks thy tongue smacks something popishly," replied the warder.

"If my English be good enough to be understood, trouble thyself no further," said the stranger, haughtily. "If not, I shall not mend it for so poor a customer. And now, prithee, let me pass. I have business with thy betters, which may not be delayed."

"Hast thou the password, good friend?" returned the warder, grasping his weapon, and seeming to eye both horse and man with no prejudice in favour of either.

"No, but I bear an order from the council to your lieutenant, sealed with the King's seal, which I must deliver in person to his honour. Here's warranty enough, companion." And the stranger produced a paper, directed as he had affirmed, which he thrust under the warder's gaze.

"Pass!" was the reply, and the cavalier, touching his horse with the spur, entered the gate. He found himself in a small quadrangle, hemmed in by lofty battlements, in which not a single human being seemed stirring. The clatter of his horse's hoofs, however, almost instantly attracted attention. An old man popped his head out of a barred window above, and after listening to the horseman's account of his object, civilly offered to guide him to the lieutenant's presence.

A hale-looking veteran, with cheeks as ruddy as apples, though his hair was nearly white, now made his appearance. He stated, however, that the lieutenant, Sir John Robinson, was at supper with some friends, and that if the business were not very pressing, it would be better to wait till his honour had done, offering, meanwhile, a stoup of canary and a seat by a good fire to the stranger, who returned his thanks for this civility in a somewhat foreign tone and manner, but declared that his errand required immediate dispatch. Then, carelessly throwing the reins to the old man,

"Prithee," he said, with an easy air of superiority, "prithee, father grey-beard, hold my nag's head, lest I stumble and break my youngster's skull, and thereby waste a soul which may be valuable when it is grown."

"What youngster, friend? I see none," said the old man.

"Look here, then; thou art old, but didst ever see a prettier creature?" said the cavalier, lifting his cloak, and revealing a young child nestling asleep in its warmth.

"Hast been in heaven kidnapping cherubs?" exclaimed the old man, gazing with admiration at the beauty of the little sleeper.

"Nay, 'faith, if all were told, rather in t'other place," said the stranger, drily. "*Hillo, mignon! c'est la reveillée!*" And he chucked his bloomy cheek till the child awoke.

"And is this fair boy your son?" said the Tower-dweller, receiving the child softly in his arms.

"It is not quite agreed whose son he is, camarado," replied the traveller, springing deftly from his saddle. "But I flatter myself 'tis not impossible. *Morbleu!* how a man's feet ache after a ten hours' ride! Prithee, hast any corner in which to bestow this reeking piece of horseflesh?"

"There is a hostel in the next yard, whither I will take it when I have shown you to the lieutenant; but methinks there is not much fear of his turning runaway."

"Never trust a horse or a woman," said the traveller, throwing the rein round a projecting stanchion. "But now he is secure; give me the child, and lead on, gaffer."

The old man complied with a smile, and opening a door, admitted them into a small chamber, apparently a guard-room, from the military accoutrements scattered about. Thence they mounted a narrow flight of stairs, and entered

a corridor, the long perspective of which terminated in massive folding-doors. The old man made a new effort, as they went, to gratify his curiosity by inquiring if the stranger came to see any of the prisoners in the Tower; and if so, belike some of those confined as abettors in the late popish conspiracy in Dublin. The stranger merely replied that he knew not his errand till Sir John informed him. The old man nodded significantly, and said no more until they reached the portal, at which he tapped. A tall lackey instantly appeared, exchanged a few words in a whisper, and the door was thrown open. The cavalier, then doffing his plumed hat, stepped boldly forward into the apartment, making a courtly reverence to Master Lieutenant and his company.

It was a large square chamber, with two bow-windows opening on the river, and richly furnished—a table in the middle being set out with much glitter and luxury of viands. At this sat three personages. One, a grave middle-aged man, with hair curling in iron-grey masses on his shoulders, was evidently the lieutenant, from a warder standing behind his chair with a massive bunch of keys. The next was as evidently his guest; a tall, well-made man, with a fat, large-featured face, half buried in a scented peruke. He had an habitual smile on his lips, and somewhat weak but lively eyes. He was dressed in the richest fashion of the time, bedizened in velvet, lace, and gold embroidery, with several lustrous rings on his plump white hands. The third at table was a lady past her meridian, but with the remains of great beauty, which she had done her best to revive by all the resources of the toilet, being rouged, patched, jewelled, and laced in profusion. Moreover, she had a voluptuous cast of features, and an eye whose expression did not appear much chastened by her matronly years and station.

The two latter persons looked at our traveller with some curiosity, and Sir John returned his salute with a stare and a nod.

"Well, sir, your peremptory purpose with us, which could not wait till we ate our strawberries?" said the lieutenant, scrutinising his visitor. He perceived a face slightly marked with the smallpox, distinguished by a very resolute and audacious expression, and a profusion of light moustache and beard. His eye fell then on the

boy, who seemed about four or five years old, and who stood gazing at him with a fine startled eye, as if in wonder. The child's figure was slight, but tall for his age, his complexion extremely fair, and features so beautiful that it was hardly possible to look at him without interest. His hair was long, and curled in brown ringlets down his back. He was dressed in a very rustic style, in a short coat of grey fustian, yellow stockings, and a wide-brimmed hat, buckled with a leaden clasp.

"Please, your honour, my purpose is best explained in this paper," said the traveller, in reply to Sir John's question. The lieutenant caught a glimpse of the seal, and took the letter with a very important "ahem!" Then carefully cutting the silk string, he opened the paper, and read the contents with a grave and thoughtful brow. Meanwhile, the gentleman at table played with the tassel of his doublet, and the lieutenant's wife took a deliberate survey of the traveller's person and equipments.

"Come hither, man," said Sir John, walking to one of the windows; "I must gauge you a little, to see you have no smuggled goods in your hold. Know you the contents of this rescript?"

"Thus far," replied the traveller, quietly sustaining the lieutenant's scrutinising look. "It is an order from his Majesty to admit your honour's poor servant, one Claude Duval, gentleman of the body to the Lord Aumerle, to his lordship's presence, now confined to the Tower on charge of treason, and of concern in the late attempt to seize on the castle of Dublin. Your honour will judge if my story tallies."

"Very exactly well. Your name, you say, is Claude Duval," said Sir John, smoothing his beard with a musing countenance.

"So I have heard these thirty years."

"Valet to Mervyn, Lord Aumerle?"

"Gentleman of the body to the Earl Aumerle," said the traveller, with dignity.

"And this child?" inquired Sir John. "The order of council says nothing of him. What is he, and why is he here?"

"Methought your honour would not refuse so poor a comfort to a prisoner as to see his only child," said

Claude, insinuatingly; "so I made bold to bring him on my own responsibility."

"You thought wrong, then, sirrah," said the lieutenant, sternly. "Mine orders are positive. The earl is confined on a charge affecting his head; and I did never hear that he had a son."

"Not by his lady, monseigneur," said Claude, eagerly; "and therefore have I brought him secretly. I do beseech you, sir, deny not my lord the only pleasure he shall probably taste again on this earth."

"His natural son, say you?" said the lieutenant, hesitatingly. "Troth he is like him enough. What say you, my lady?" he added abruptly, stepping back into the chamber, and addressing his wife, who seemed engaged in an interesting conversation with the cavalier at table, who was leaning amorously towards her on his elbow.

"How say I, Sir John? Troth, if it be on the article of your breeding, I must needs say 'tis country-taught to leave your guest so long with an empty goblet," replied the lady, with a smile at her guest, who coloured, smiled too, and arranged his lace frill.

"Nay, I but asked you if you marked the likeness between my Lord Aumerle and this unlawful cub of his," said the lieutenant, biting his lip.

"My Lord Aumerle is a man of a most noble and courtly presence," replied the lady, carelessly glancing at the boy. "Good truth! there is resemblance enough to make out a case before any justice in the land; but the child is fairer, and hath a merrier eye. How deem you, Mr. Pepys?"

"I never saw his lordship but once, and then for a moment through an iron grating," replied the gentleman.

"Oh, fie, Mr. Pepys! I warrant me you have seen him oft enough at the Queen's popish chapel, whither they say you are not so unfrequent a visitor as suits the times," replied the fair hostess, with a significant smile.

"Good faith, lady! 'tis a false report of mine enemies," said Mr. Pepys, eagerly. When Sir John interrupted him, somewhat rudely,

"Well, well, Monsieur Devlle, or Duval, or what's your name? we will indulge the earl in this matter for once —mark you, for *once*. Where is the man who came with you? Oh, Edwards," he said, as the old man emerged

from a gilded screen ; " take the keys of Lord Aumerle's apartment, and guide this gentleman to his presence. Lock them up together for an hour—no longer."

" Alone, your honour ? " said Edwards, with a dubious glance.

" Yes, alone. Wherefore not ? " replied Sir John, with a sharp glance at his wife. " The order is so worded. An they were fox and goose, they were ill left together for an instant."

" Bring the child hither, Master Duval," said the lady, with a tart smile at this last observation. " I would give him some fruit and a fairylike tasse of sherris, if his rustical poll can bear such unwonted luxury."

" And merrily too," said Claude. " And if the goblet were a thought deeper, I would humbly crave leave to drink so fair a lady's health."

" Thou art a bold companion, friend," said Sir John, with a glance full of suspicion.

" Thou shalt have it, for the valour of asking," pursued the lady, with a spiteful smile at her husband. " Mr. Pepys, pray you fill that tankard with the Burgundy at your elbow, and give it to this good varlet to drink our health."

The cavalier obeyed with alacrity, and Sir John, throwing himself into his arm-chair, began cracking nuts and humming a tune, affecting to look with indifference on the river. Claude, meanwhile, took his goblet with a profusion of French acknowledgments, and pledging the lady-lieutenant's health, drained it to the dregs. The boy imitated him directly, and as if conscious of the mimicry, laughed as he set down his little glass, with a smack of the lips which feebly echoed Duval's. He accepted a bunch of grapes from the lady with the same frankness, but the lieutenant, as if weary of the scene, abruptly desired Edwards to lead the way. Claude took the boy in his arms, where he was kissed by the fair hostess herself, with many commendations of his beauty. Edwards received the bunch of keys from the warder, and escorted them out, Claude bowing rather to the lady than to her potent lord as he made his exit.

" Marry, Mr. Pepys, and a very proper man of his calling," said the lady.

" Faith, madam, he hath rogue as plainly lurking in

his eye as any fellow I know unhanged," replied the cavalier, who was carefully peeling an apple. "But now let me offer your ladyship a sweet sample of the same rich fruit which tempted Madame Eve—good troth, a love-apple!"

"This Claude Duval will as certainly come to the rope as his master to the axe," said Sir John, rising, and walking hastily up and down; "he hath 'gallows-bird' labelled on his forehead."

"Marry, then, it will be for some offence that hath full as much mirth as mischief in it," replied his gay wife. "What say you, Mr. Pepys?"

"But is it assured my Lord Aumerle will come to the block?" said Mr. Pepys, making no reply but an expressive smile.

"No doubt, as soon as the Londoners need a victim, or the court a peace-offering," replied Sir John. "He hath three potent enemies—his religion, his wife, and himself."

"His wife?" echoed Pepys, with great incredulity, as if the thing were totally impossible.

"Yes, sir—his wife," said the lieutenant, gloomily. "The bitterest enemy a man has oft lies in his bosom. They have been separated these several years; scarce one year married, ere madam eloped with that profligate, my Lord Howard of Eskricke. But, Heaven be praised! he is as poor as a rat or a cavalier, and they are suffering bitter poverty."

"Better is a fast in love than a feast in hate," said the lady, with a gay glance at Mr. Pepys. "But I never heard till now she had such cause for her hatred as this fair child would seem to witness; I always thought he loved her most unmeasuredly. However, if this accusation of the villanous Irish traitor, Blood, prove founded—the axe will rid her not only of a man she abhors, but make her the richest woman in England. She is his cousin, Mr. Pepys, and heir to his title and vast possessions, he having no lawful issue."

"Good Lord!—and who knows—mayhap she is at the bottom of it all!" said Pepys, turning up his eyes. "Good lack! the wickedness of women!—craving your ladyship's pardon. But perchance the poor earl may be as innocent as myself. From all that I hear, he has only his popish religion, a wicked woman, and the mad fury of the rabble against him."

"Enough and to spare to bring him to the sawdust," said Sir John.

"Marry, the earl is too obstinate," replied the lady; "he hath ever refused to divorce his wife, though she swears she will die sooner than return to him. They say she was forced to marry him, too, by her old savage of a father, and Howard, I know, was her first love; and first or second loves are very hard to root out, Mr. Pepys. But, good lack! now I remember, I promised to show you my Italian violets on the south terrace. Prithee, Sir John, will you go with us?"

"Nay, wife, I must take my rounds—you know it is the hour," he replied, with affected cheerfulness; "I dare trust Mr. Pepys with your ladyship, though the times are not so virtuous that a man should trust his own brother—but Mr. Pepys is married, and I could avenge me—ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" echoed the guest, rising, and with courtly grace assisting the lady to put on her mantle and hood. "But that were a poor revenge, Sir John, seeing how marvellously your lady hath the advantage of mine in beauty!"

Then offering his arm with a deep bow, and carrying his plumed hat in his hand, Mr. Pepys stepped forth into the corridor, with my lady-lieutenant's white hand reposing on his velvet sleeve.

Sir John looked after them for a moment, shaking his fist with affected playfulness, and then threw himself into his chair with a deep sigh, when his eye suddenly encountered the motionless figure of the warder behind. He instantly attempted to sing, but with such bad success that, annoyed at his own failure, he began to rate the fellow for a lazy, loitering, prying rascal, and having commanded him to remove the viands, he left the apartment, ostensibly to perform his duties in the fortress, but in reality to steal along the corridor to a narrow window which overlooked the *south terrace*.

CHAPTER II

THE STATE PRISONER

Duval, meanwhile, followed his conductor through a series of passages and gloomy apartments into a narrow basement-floor, where Edwards paused to point out some low planks under a little staircase which they were about to ascend. Here, he said, were discovered the bones of Edward V. and the young Duke of York, murdered by their uncle Crookback. He added that the Lord Aumerle was lodged in the suite above, and that the building in which they stood was called the Bloody Tower, from the many sanguinary deeds which had been wrought in it.

Ascending the little staircase, Edwards unlocked an iron door secured by many bolts and a massive chain, which admitted them to a small dark chamber scantily furnished, overlooking a courtyard below. There was another door opposite slightly ajar, to which the old man crossed and knocked. No answer was returned, and motioning his companions to follow, he opened it and walked boldly in, observing that ceremonies were for courts, not prisons. A somewhat unexpected sight, however, induced him to pause and sink his voice into a lower key.

The chamber in which they found themselves was large but exceedingly gloomy, being lighted only by a high barred window, through which the evening sun fell slantingly, and threw all objects but those it touched into deep shadow. Beneath this light stood a desk, on which were a silver crucifix, a massive candelabrum, and writing materials scattered about. At the table, half concealed in a huge arm-chair, sat a stately form, his head supported on his hand, and apparently so lost in meditation that he noticed neither the knock nor the entrance of his visitors. He was dressed in black velvet trimmed with glittering jet ornaments, as if in mourning, and a pointed hat, lying beside him on the desk, drooped heavily with plumes of the same funereal colour. His hair, which was grizzled over with premature old age, had once been glossy black, as his beard and moustache still were. The light fell full upon his face and revealed features peculiarly handsome,

but marked by an expression of deep melancholy, and pale even to ghastliness. His eyes, which were stretched upwards, were of a fine intellectual blue, but though turned in earnest gaze on the iron bars, it seemed as if their sense was lost in thought. He had evidently been writing a paper which lay before him, for he still held the pen in his hand, and appeared to be ruminating on what he had written.

The apartment was furnished in the taste of the fifteenth century, with the massive chairs and immovable tables in which our ancestors delighted, and the walls were hung with curious tapestry, representing the fortunes of Esther. There was a door open, communicating with another chamber, in which appeared a lofty bed hung with crimson damask, richly embroidered. This chamber was lighted by a barred window, looking on huge battlements and roofs of houses, sloping down to the river-edge, which glittered beyond.

" My lord," said Edwards, " here is one of your servants, who, I hope, brings you news of better cheer than you are wont to hear."

The prisoner started from his thoughtful attitude, and, in the first surprise, laid his hand where his sword should have been ; but, recollecting himself instantly, he smiled, and said, in a tone of satisfaction,

" Is it thou, old Talbot ? I am glad to see thee well, for, i' faith, thou art honester, as the world goes, than nine-tenths of the unhanged. What say you, who is so mindful of himself as to remember me ? "

" Your faithful servant, Claude Duval," exclaimed the traveller, throwing himself on his knee, and bursting into tears, as he kissed the earl's hand, extended to raise him.

" My good Duval, you have let no grass grow under your horse's hoofs," said the prisoner, eagerly ; " but where is my—where is the child ? "

" This is little Mervyn, my lord," said Claude, stepping aside, and disclosing the boy, who was clinging to his cloak, and gazing round with visible terror.

" 'Tis a lovely thing ; I did never see Italian cherub that matched him in beauty ! " said the earl, his marble complexion brightening with a deep glow. " Come hither, child ; I will not harm thee."

" Go, Mervyn—what ! art afraid of the noble gentle-

man?" said Claude, taking the reluctant hand of the child, who slunk back.

"No, I am not afraid of the gentleman—but what is that black thing on the table?" said the boy, pointing to the earl's hat.

"Tut, it is gone!" said Aumerle, throwing it aside. "Give me thy hand, Mervyn; tell me, didst ever see me ere now?"

"Yes—once—when I was a naughty boy, and dreamed a wicked dream, nurse said," replied the boy.

"Faith, he remembers your lordship's secret visit in Cornwall, when you saw him by torchlight as he slept in his crib," said Claude.

"Yes, and you kissed me, and your lips were so hot—like fire," continued the child, nevertheless putting his hand in the earl's. "But I am not afraid of you, because nurse said you loved me, although you hated me."

"She told thee truly, child, albeit so quaintly," said the prisoner, putting back the boy's fair hair, and gazing at him with deep and sorrowful earnestness. "Look here, Duval—see you these sparkling eyes and perfect mouth? These be the gifts of his beautiful bad mother. God grant he match her not in wickedness as in beauty!"

"Amen, my lord!" echoed Claude. "But I did just leave the lieutenant and his company, marvelling at his close resemblance to your lordship. In truth, my dearest master—not to quarrel with your opinions on the matter—he is as like you as ever son to father. But for all that, I say not that he is your son."

"Duval," said the earl, with much apparent agitation, "in truth, mine own opinions have undergone a strange revolution. Good Master Edwards, have you, perchance, licence to leave us some brief moments alone?"

"An hour, my lord," replied the old man, colouring, and starting from the attitude of extreme curiosity in which he was listening.

"For so much, then, we excuse your kind attendance, old Talbot," said the earl, gently; and the keeper of the regalia vanished, with some appearance of confusion.

"The old man hath his faults, like all human excellence," said Aumerle, smiling placidly after his jailer; "among the rest, unbounded curiosity and credulity, which are usual companions; but he hath served me, and his son

is to render me some good for much which I did him formerly."

"But, my lord," said Duval, anxiously, "methought you spoke of some alteration in your opinions concerning your—the boy."

"Else deem you I should be seized with this dread for his safety?" said the earl. "If I still believed the—the tale—what should I fear for his life from that devilish pair? Claude, I have learned that which—thou knowest how my poor broken heart did ever cling, even when most deceived by those hideous forgeries, to that strong instinct which taught me that every drop in his sweet veins flowed from this heart, which, even in its wildest madness, doted on him. Yet who could have thought such unnatural perfidy could be in woman? that a human mother could rage more cruelly against her offspring than a famished she-wolf? 'Tis horrible but to dream such horrors—yet they are! Heaven forgive me the injury my infatuated credulity has already done thee, my blessed child!"

And with tears gushing in quick drops from his eyes, Aumerle clasped the boy in his arms, and passionately kissed him—an operation to which he submitted in silent wonder.

"Our Lady be praised for this!" said Claude, brushing the dew from his own lids, which sprang in spite of his efforts. "Yet, by her sweet name! if ever I doubted that Master Mervyn was yours, every inch of him, may I lack her aid when I need it most!"

"Thou didst ever reason with my madness as with a stormy sea," said the prisoner, more calmly. "But for that, and much more, Claude, if I live, I will prove a grateful debtor."

The earl continued silent for some minutes, gazing intently at the child. "Duval," he said, at length, with a sigh, "but for one little grain of doubt, how nectarous were this cup of joy! to feel the assurance that my ancestors' glories would yet survive in this beautiful and noble form when mine is laid for ever low!—But at present I have no time for tears, albeit of joy. Claude, I think—I am sure I may confide in thee?"

"To the last drop of my blood, dear master."

"Well then, I will tell thee," said the prisoner, glancing

cautiously around. "My life is in great jeopardy—indeed, I am well persuaded I shall never leave these walls alive, not even to play a part on Traitors' Green; but if my son were safe, death has no terrors to me. I fear Duval—I fear—nay, I know, that neither his mother nor her paramour would hesitate to shed even his blood, if they thought it necessary to secure their inheritance from me."

"But is it possible, my lord, they can carry their wickedness to such a damnable excess as to bring you to the block on a charge of which they know your innocence?"

"I know not, Duval! They have good witnesses—men accustomed to sell the blood of innocence. The king loves not me—the populace hate the mere sound of my name. Did not Dr. Tongue preach against me in St. Mary's, on the Armada day, calling me the bloodthirsty papist, who only wanted power to be Haman of this generation of Israel? And, Claude," continued the prisoner, turning still paler, "know you not that the chief perjurer against me is that murderous villain, Colonel Blood? He hates and fears me too much to leave this work half done!"

"He was well named the Irish Judas!" exclaimed Claude. "But, my lord, give not way to such gloomy forebodings."

"Tut, Duval! 'tis not for myself I fear," said the earl, hastily. "Life hath but few temptations left for me; my sun hath gone down at noonday, and left all darkness. I say not that I desire to die, for I would fain live to restore my son to his rank and name; but if that may not be—but again I will not indulge in these sad thoughts. Why, as thou sayest, all may yet be well. The King hath acceded to my earnest prayer, and grants me an audience to-morrow in this dungeon of mine, unless my enemies should meantime learn the secret and baffle me, which I fear not, for it is confided to one man only, my dearest friend, whose importunities wrung this from the King. You have heard me speak of Colonel Sydney, alas! and he departed this morn to Denmark."

"But, my lord, what good do you anticipate from——"

"Listen, Claude," interrupted the earl, drawing a paper from his doublet, his eyes flashing suddenly with excitement. "I hold here a document which will go far to clear me in his royal eyes, and will restore my son to all his rights.

Careless as he is, the King loves no injustice which he commits not himself. If I live this shall be done, if not, my son will survive to avenge me."

"But, my dear lord, surely there is no reason to apprehend personal violence?" said Claude, shuddering.

"You little know what sort of hounds are on my track," replied the prisoner, with an anxious glance around the chamber. "My enemies have committed themselves too deeply, and, like murderers, after the first blow is struck, they *dare* not let me live. Who knows what secrets this tapestry veils? Troth, Duval, these walls could tell many a fearful tale, if they had tongues to speak. I have sounded them about, and they give many a hollow answer. But no matter. If they come not upon me in my sleep, they shall not find it woman's work. My good Claude, it is not their policy to have me die a traitor's death, for then the rich inheritance they hope to possess would be all forfeit to the crown; yet, wherefore they have involved me in this Irish conspiracy, and bribed Blood to include me in the general accusation, puzzles my judgment."

"Mayhap they depend on their favour with the King to bar the confiscation," said Duval, anxious to dissipate the still more fearful alternative.

"It may be so, and the belief comforts me," said the prisoner, calmly. "And now listen to me with attention, Duval, for what I say must be registered clearly in your memory. Doubtless you were surprised at the hot haste with which I sent you to bring this child from Wales to visit me in my durance—I, unto whom his very presence once infused horror, though loving him dearer than mine eyes—in this resembling the poor dog-bitten wretch who thirsts unto death, yet agonises at the sight of water. Listen, then, to the contents of this paper, which I may well call my salvation, though thou wilt marvel when I tell thee 'tis a letter from my wife, brought at her command by no more welcome messenger than Blood himself. And this I mean to show to the King, and none shall deprive me of it but with my life."

The earl continued opening a paper as he spoke, and little Mervyn, who had now got over his panic, sat on his knee as he read it, playing with a jewelled miniature which hung on his breast. Excited as he evidently was, Aumerle read in a deep, stifled undertone, as if he feared that its contents

might reach some listener, though there seemed little cause for apprehension, as they had heard Talbot bolting three doors after him as he retired. The contents ran thus, slightly broken by the earl's comments.

"My Lord Aumerle! (for it is thus, Claude, that my affectionate and faithful wife addresses her imprisoned husband). My Lord Aumerle!

"It is with extreme pain, and much doubt of my own judgment, that I write to you once more, and for the last time: but I am overruled by those who have a right to exact this complaisance from me. (Ha, truly! the villain Howard,—or honest Master Blood?) I write not, my lord, to deny that, in the world's eye, you are a deeply-wronged man, and I your wronger; how far with justice so judged, your own heart better knows—you who, aided by a father whose cruelty I dare no longer excuse to that tribunal before which he has appeared, tore me from the arms of the only man I ever loved, to fill a loathed place in yours. Neither do I write to insult your misfortunes in this that I, so injured by you, am now the arbitratrix of your fate almost as certainly as Fate herself—and you know if you have deserved much moderation from me. I do, indeed, most solemnly avow before God, and would before men, but that other considerations pluck me back, that I did ever hate you, and shall to my dying day and hour. Why would you still hold a woman in your chains who abhors the mere sound of your name? But, in truth, I write to resume the proposal which I made you oft before, as well as on Monday se'nnight, by my friend, Colonel Blood. And these terms I offer you again, very earnestly praying you to regard your life and honour better than to reject them.

"You know well (not to speak indiscreetly) that it is in my power either to withdraw the charge on which you are a doleful prisoner, or to press it on to its bloodiest consequence. You know with what passion my Lord Howard and I desire to remove all blame from our life by a public marriage, that our child may not be born also with reason to curse your obstinacy; and this may not be without the Church's divorce between us two, which hath long been in heart and person. You know, too, that my Lord Howard is not rich, and I would not bring him beggary as well as so much trouble; therefore I made those terms

which, methinks, are as fair and equitable as reason can devise. You are not now to learn that I am heir to your title and rich earldom, if you leave no lawful issue, which you will not—if you force me to confirm by public declaration what I have already affirmed concerning the child, Reginald. I am now, however, willing to confess that he is your lawful son and heir (as Heaven witness, so he is), and to suffer his inheritance, albeit I love him not (which is a fair proof he is none of my Lord Howard's, as I feigned, to madden you and avenge me), on conditions which I hereinafter name.

"Firstly: that you join with me to obtain a divorce, on grounds of disagreement in religion, and the compulsion used against me, which, as is just, you must avow.

"Secondly: that you settle half the rental of your estates upon me during your lifetime, and the manor of Mervyn in perpetual; also, that you charge your son's succession with an annual payment (in case I survive you) of five thousand moidores in gold, Paris weight, which is only an addition of one thousand livres on the jointure settled one me at our marriage.

"These terms being satisfactorily complied with, I will withdraw, annul, and disavow, if you will so, in legal form, all that I have done and said tending to the opinion of your son's illegitimacy, and I will publicly acknowledge him the true and lawful heir to your estate, blood, and dignity.

"Otherwise, though it were to cover myself with ignominy to the day of doom itself, I will proclaim you a dishonoured wretch, and your son a bastard, before the peers of England, and demand the inheritance which (from your sickly aspect) methinks I shall not wait for long, unless you are soon let out of your donjon to the free air.

"These from the injured woman whose greatest sorrow is that she is obliged to sign herself your lordship's wife,

"Eleanor Aumerle."

"Duval," said the earl, gaspingly, as he concluded, "now tell me, in good faith, what think you of this lady?"

"In good faith, then, my lord earl," replied Claude, "your lady hath even as black a soul as she hath fair body, and methinks that rivals the angels. But what answer sent you?"

"Canst ask, Claude?" said the prisoner, sharply.

"What answer but that which I returned to all former threats and persuasions, and which shall be my latest word, whether on the scaffold, or torn to pieces by the mad populace, or struggling beneath the murderer's knife—never, never! They shall have my heart ere they have the word they seek."

"But, my lord, surely there is some wondrous cause for so black a hate?" said Duval, soothingly.

"She never loved me, man," replied the earl, gloomily; "her heart was fixed on this villain, Howard; but, seduced by the knavish folly of her father, and that fatal dower of beauty, which was all she had—I forced him at the sword's point to resign his pretensions, and wedded her, I must needs own, against her will—but then I knew it not!"

The unhappy prisoner paused abruptly, and Claude, not knowing what to say, stood playing with his plume for several minutes.

"But are you well assured, my lord," he said at last, not so much weighing what he said as anxious to say something, "that Colonel Sydney will not betray your counsel? I have heard he is a near friend and intimate of Lord Howard's."

"'Tis true; but his very soul is honour: I will not doubt my friend," said the earl; "much as he loves that rogue, he hath taken my part throughout this affair. Was he not my second when I challenged Howard, and my wife, disguised as a page, held his horse while he fought with me? Ah! had we not been parted by the meddling watch, I had indeed glutted my revenge, and hacked him to pieces before her eyes!"

"The time may yet come, my lord," exclaimed Duval.

"But if I should perish in the meantime," said the earl, with a ghastly smile, "if you should hear that I, the melancholy Catholic earl, have committed suicide in the Tower, do thou call it in thy prayers, Claude, *murder*! In that case, thou wilt know that mine enemies have thrown the gauntlet to fate, and it will be in vain to urge my son's claims—they will sink with my blood into the earth. I charge thee, expose not his life to danger by any attempt of the sort; the time will come. Keep his hiding-place a secret from the world, and his birth from himself, till he is able to withstand their machinations. Times will alter, and surely now they are at the worst. These tempests

will purify the plague-tainted atmosphere of men's opinions, and a sunshine follow which will give the lilies of justice light to bloom."

"But will not silence confirm their possession till too late to be disputed?" said Duval.

"And what proofs could be adduced against it?" said Aumerle, sadly. "This letter?—they will call it a forgery. Oh, what madness was it that blinded me so that I perceived not her purpose when she wrung my consent to a public declaration of the child's death, threatening else to expose all! And I, oh, fool! oh, wretch! led by a mad credulity —well, no more. I may live to repair my pretty Mervyn's wrongs." And he smoothened back the child's fair ringlets with a look of unutterable love and sorrow.

"You will live, my lord—we shall all live—to hear Mervyn Castle ring with the festival which shall celebrate your heir's restoration," said Duval.

"Well, well, I am willing to look on the sunny side of things," said Aumerle, with a melancholy smile. "But—thou knowest I am not held a coward—but I did never see that man Blood without a chill of horror—not fear. I feel as if my evil genius were then in presence; but these, perchance, are but sickly fancies of a troubled soul—let them pass. Duval, I intend that you sail to-morrow for Calais, and I have devised a plan by which to elude the Dutch and French cruisers as well as our own. Old Edwards hath a son, a noted smuggler, but at present carrying letters of marque against the French. He commands a little schooner in the river, but having acquaintance and understanding with the whole coast of France, he will be able to land you at Calais, and, for a sum of gold, hath agreed so to do. Once there, your letters to the provincial are a sufficient passport."

"'Tis a marvellously well-seeming plan, my lord," said Claude, filling up his master's pause.

"The vessel is lying at Woolwich," continued the earl, "but the crew are principally in London, at a house on the bridge kept by an old servant of my family—you remember her, Temperance Bradley? The inn is called, if I mistake not, the Aumerle Arms, and Captain Edwards is there, who will take charge of your safety until to-morrow, when you will sail, weather allowing. Spare not till you have placed my son in safety at Saint Omer, and on the instant

return with your good news. If you find me alive, you shall not find me ungrateful."

"Oh, my dear lord, do not yield to such sad thoughts."

"I cannot help them, Claude. They come over me like the gloom before the storm—I know not whence nor how. But I do hope much from my interview with the king to-morrow."

The earl now unlocked the desk before him, and, opening a secret drawer secured with a spring, took out a letter sealed with his arms, and directed to the Father Provincial, De Oliva, at the Jesuits' College at St. Omer, and with it a canvas bag, also sealed.

"Here are a hundred gold doubloons, Claude, to bear your charges," he continued. "This letter is to my good friend and early tutor, De Oliva, who is now at the college, on his visitation; present with it this bill on my Paris banker, for, though I know the good fathers need no bribe to do me a service, my son shall owe nothing to charity. I also commission you to place in the padre's custody my jewels and insignia of the garter, which he may preserve as means to identify my son at a future day."

Opening a gold casket, the earl took out the jewelled chain and dragon of the royal order. Attracted by the fiery sparkle of the jewels, little Mervyn made a bold clutch at them, and the earl, amused by his eagerness, threw the collar over him, and it hung glittering almost to his feet. The exceeding beauty of the child, and the joy which lightened over his face, struck the earl with a mingled passion of sorrow and delight, and, throwing himself back in his chair, he hid his face and wept.

Mervyn seemed suddenly to suspect that it was he who caused this burst of grief, and exclaiming, "Don't cry, sir; I will not take them away—I will not," leaped into his father's arms, and kissed him with childish efforts at consolation.

At this moment the clang of a door was heard, and Edwards's voice in angry expostulation. A deep rough voice replied, in a louder key,

"I tell thee, my Cerberus of jewels and jewel of Cerberuses, I must and will see this caged earl of yours. Here is my warrant from a hand which Master Lieutenant hath allowed, cap in hand. Prithee, unbar the den, and let us into this

cat-a-mountain ; he is too well tamed to tear a body to pieces."

Edwards seemed to mutter something in reply, and began unfastening the massive door, after knocking to signify his intention.

" It is Blood ! " said the earl, turning ashy pale ; and almost as Claude, who, despite his strong nerves, was considerably startled, turned towards the door, it was pushed rudely open and a man stepped into the apartment, followed by Edwards. So peculiar was the whole appearance of this bold visitor, that even little Mervyn, screaming lustily, crouched down, and hid his face in his father's mantle.

CHAPTER III

COLONEL BLOOD

" Pardon, my lord, this somewhat abrupt entrance into your honourable presence," was the new visitor's address, delivered with a bold scrutinising glance on all present, and concluding with one of threatening inquiry at the earl.

" Colonel Blood's presence always brings its own excuse—apparently," replied the earl, with a deep flush. " But methinks 'tis somewhat superfluous courtesy to ask a prisoner's pardon for entering his dungeon, si'thence he hath neither means nor right to resist such authorised intrusion."

" I shall not trouble your lordship long ; but for the brief space which I needs must, I will anticipate *your* courtesy so far as to seat myself," said the colonel, throwing himself with perfect nonchalance into a chair, and kicking a stool towards him, on which he leisurely crossed his legs.

Claude felt his first emotion of alarm and curiosity at the appearance of a man so renowned for almost every species of daring villany, rapidly changing into indignation at his insolence, but he was obliged to suppress all exterior signs, and to content himself with returning the colonel's deliberate inspection.

He beheld a figure remarkable, at first glance, for its prodigious strength and muscular symmetry, the bull-like

massiveness of the neck and shoulders, and the somewhat peculiar largeness of the head. His face, however, was what chiefly caught the eye, and fixed it in indistinct fear and suspicion. The features, considered without their expression, though perfectly Irish in their conformation, were not unhandsome ; the lips, though thin and too wide had a determined curve ; and the forehead, although low, with its massive overhanging eyebrows, gave the idea of a rude power and energy of intellect, able to second, but too well, the volitions of a coarse and sensual nature. Thick curls of close jet-black hair clustered round his head, his beard and moustaches were, if possible, of a still more raven dye, and grew about his lips and face in short curly bristles, which gave him a wild-boar fierceness of aspect. But it was the expression of these features, the bloodhound glitter of his large brown eyes, which, in spite of the bold plausibility of his manners, excited alarm and disgust in all who beheld him.

Never was there a truer index of character than this man's visage. Courage, perfidy, a remorseless energy of purpose and execution, were as plainly visible in the workings of his eye as in the acts of that strange and sanguinary career which has stamped Blood the most remarkable villain of an age abounding in such.

He was dressed in the usual splendid style of the period, but with something sinister and uncommon in his choice of colours. His doublet was of black silk, slashed with red, his mantle and hat of yellow velvet, profusely ornamented with flame-coloured ribands. His stockings and rosettes were of different colours, a collar of crimson lace covered his breast, and a sword of formidable length knocked at his heels from a belt in which was also a single pistol, very richly mounted.

Having seated himself to his satisfaction, Blood amused himself for a minute of deep silence (during which the earl seemed hesitating whether to resent his insolent effrontery or not) by taking a keenly deliberate survey of little Mervyn, who looked at him with unfeigned terror. At last he observed, with a peculiar smile,

" The little gentleman and I seem to have a kind of mutual recollection of each other—may I ask your lordship to refresh my memory with his name ? "

" Certainly, Mr. Blood," replied the earl, with forced

composure. "But before I answer your question, allow me to ask what urgent business it is which compels you to break so unwelcomely on my privacy?"

"That will I in as brief space as you might crush a grasshopper," replied the visitor, carelessly drawing his pistol, as if it incommoded him. "But I doubt our audience, though few, is not fit."

"None fitter, sir; this gentleman is my most trusted and confidential servant. If what you say cannot be confided to honest ears, I care not to be of your audience."

"Honest! are your ears honest, friend?" said Blood, turning to Claude, with affected astonishment. "Marry, then, look that you do not lose them in the pillory."

"Faith, sir, I do not think they run any risk in a country where your honour's are safe!" replied Claude, sharply.

"'Sbodikins, man! but you answer glibly," said the visitor, measuring Claude from head to foot. "And, by St. Patrick's corns, a likely man of the sort! does your steel ring such jangling music as your tongue?"

"Will you try, sir?" said Duval, colouring and clapping his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Not on such poor cattle as thou art, friend," replied the colonel, with a laugh. "Your eagle will not be crammed with oatmeal like a jackdaw, and my prey is not poor servingmen and insolent varlets, but princes, dukes, and nobles of ancient blood."

"Peace, Claude!" interrupted the earl, authoritatively. "And for you, sir, either explain your purpose, or rid me of a presence which I freely confess is the most displeasant to me of any on this side death. We are not now to learn of what great felonies and high-soaring villanies Colonel Blood is capable."

"My lord," replied the colonel, with a complacent smile at this last observation; "to pass over an eloquent preamble I had prepared to usher in this last trial I shall ever make of your patience, have you maturely weighed the determination in which I had the trouble to leave you, and are you still resolved to sacrifice life and honour to a vain scruple? Pronounce the word—I am on my way to the council, either to confirm or cancel my depositions against you."

"The justice of England is not yet so deeply polluted in its streams as its source, that I should fear your threats,"

said the earl, calmly. "I dare not think so meanly of any twelve of my countrymen as to deem that, prejudiced as they are, they will condemn an English nobleman to the block on the unsupported testimony of a man so notorious for his indifference to all ties, divine or human, as Mr. Blood."

"For all that I have done in the way of tiffs with old Mother Law, I have the king's pardon in my pocket," replied the colonel. "And as for the justice of any twelve men in England, it is worth precisely what the highest bidder will give; and your lordship knows if, in your present sequestered state, you are likely to carry the auction. Once more, then, I beseech you to consider your resolution—for the last time."

"It is considered for the last time—hear it!" said Aumerle, with the quivering calm of concentrated passion. "You are come in good time, Mr. Blood, to witness, in common with my servant, Duval, what I now declare, and call Heaven to witness, is the determination in which I will live and die. This child, on whom your eye dwells with such pertinacity, though educated as the offspring of a poor Cornish woman, I hereby acknowledge to be my lawful son and sole heir, Reginald Lord Mervyn. And as such I leave him the inheritance of his ancestors; sooner than part with one inch of which to that woman and her paramour, I will die as many deaths as the utmost rage of my enemies could inflict! And thereto I call you, Colonel Blood, to bear testimony, as I doubt not my faithful Duval will, when the time comes."

"With my heart's last drop," exclaimed Claude.

"Say you so, Master Lackey?" said Blood, with a glance of speechless contempt. "So, then, this burst of madness is your lordship's sober resolution? You refuse to yield a little, and so force those who have the power to take all?"

"I defy both them and you," exclaimed the earl, rising, with much agitation. "Begone, and do your worst. There is One above will avenge me. Yea, I am certain as that I now breathe and speak, and may soon cease to do either, that even in the small arm of this child lives a might which shall some day avenge his father's wrongs—ay, beyond even his father's prayers."

"But of what use is passion, my lord?" returned Blood,

amusing himself with snapping in and out a spring dagger concealed in the pistol. "In truth, if the boy calls you father, 'tis a flattering compliment, for he is of a marvellously perfect cut. Marry! how his eyes sparkle to see this sharp toy of mine leap in and out. I warrant me now, young sir, thou wouldst give me a grape or two to play at this? Come hither, child."

And rudely clutching the boy's arm, in spite of his shrieks, he drew him forward, and with such violence, that happening to stumble over a stool, he fell, and hit his forehead against the hilt of the colonel's sword. A red stream instantly gushed from his brow, and, almost simultaneously, Blood measured his length on the floor, struck down by a vigorous blow from the earl.

To spring again on his feet, and rush towards Aumerle, with his dagger raised, was but an instant's work, and the consequences must have been fatal, as the earl, though unarmed, awaited him without flinching, had not Claude darted between and, dexterously clutching Blood by the wrist, wrenched away his weapon, and threw it to the other end of the apartment. The latter, like a tiger baffled of his prey, turned with additional fury on his new assailant, and a struggle commenced, the issue of which was very doubtful; but luckily the noise brought assistance, just as the earl was rushing to part the combatants. Edwards and a warder ran in, and succeeded, with some difficulty, in separating the enraged belligerents.

Meanwhile, the earl seemed utterly heedless of the brawl, raising the senseless child in his arms, and calling for help in a tone of distraction. Edwards and Duval came to his assistance, and Blood himself, perceiving the impossibility of further aggression, sullenly desired the warder to give what assistance he could; then reseating himself, he quietly stanched the gore which flowed from his own nostrils and brow, glancing from time to time at the opposite group.

An old woman, whom Edwards summoned, now arrived, and applied vinegar and some strong waters to the child's temples. At last he revived, but only to burst into a long fit of sobbing and crying, during which the earl soothed, caressed, and kissed him, with the passionate tenderness of a young mother.

It was soon found that the child had sustained only a trifling injury, and he grew more composed, when his terrors

were renewed by the appearance of his enemy, who came forward with a face much disfigured by blood, and a purple bruise on his temples. Aumerle looked at him with a stern and doubtful eye, though without expecting any further attack.

"Be not afraid, Lord Aumerle," said Blood, with a loud and scornful laugh; "I do not intend to hurt your lordship: the whole affair is one of damnable folly, which, for my part, I am willing to forget and forgive."

"Blood, I know you will neither forgive nor forget," replied Aumerle. "I do not desire that you should. I know what to conclude from this seeming moderation; but remember, it was your own insolence which provoked me to this act, which, however, I do most heartily rejoice and exult in. Now go whither you are bound. Mr. Edwards, I desire you to show Colonel Blood out of my apartment, and never, under whatever pretext, admit him again."

"Goodness me! but your head is sadly bruised, sir," said Mrs. Edwards, raising her vinegar-bottle. "Let me dress it, for a blue bruise is ten times easier to mend than a green. Good lack! do, sir."

"My lord," said Blood, without, perhaps, hearing this invitation in the absorption of passion, "I do not intend to trouble you with my presence again; but as I would not part in hatred from one whom it needs no stretch of fancy to call a *dying man*, I bid your lordship very cordially farewell. You have struck me, Earl Aumerle," he concluded, turning deadly white, and smiling with inexpressible malice—"you have struck me, and I have not returned the blow—look that your prayers be said when I do."

And, without waiting a reply, he strode to the door, stooped, apparently to pick up his pistol, and left the room with a slam which made even its massive wall shake, and sent the dust from the tapestry in a cloud.

The effect of this furious speech on the earl was instantaneous and strangely deep. He paced up and down, in a state of extreme agitation, his brow bathed in damp dews. At last, he paused abruptly, and telling Edwards that he needed only five minutes' longer privacy, requested him to retire, with the warder and his wife, into the antechamber.

"I did abase myself to strike so inordinate a villain," said Aumerle, when they were gone; "yet am I glad there was no mortal weapon in my reach, else had I sent him,

black with unnumbered sins, before Him whose every law he has broken. And yet, Claude, my blood thickens when I recall his deadly smile. I did ever shrink even from his blandishments when he seemed most my friend, and, by his devilish artifices, induced me to sign the catholic petition, whose delivery, it seems, was the signal of revolt in Dublin. If ever you should hear that I have committed suicide, Claude, be sure *it will be by that hand.*"

The earl paused, and glanced gloomily around the wide and dreary chamber, which was thrown into masses of shadow by the faint rays of moonlight streaming in at the iron bars. Claude could only perceive the deadly paleness of his master's features, but he observed him start and point towards a part of the tapestry which either stirred, or to Claude's alarmed eye, seemed to stir. He replied to the tacit question, however, with a poor attempt at a laugh, and an assurance that it was only the wind.

"It may be so," said Aumerle, after a moment's pause. "My spirits are utterly disturbed and off their hinges. My very senses are fools of my imagination; my heart palpitates, and my hair bristles with horror, if a plank creaks, or a swallow twitters on the battlements above. Yet was it not I who carried off the only flag lost by Cromwell's army at Worcester? No more of these follies. Claude, I shall not rest until you are safely lodged at Bradley's; I know them honest. Here—aid me while I seal these papers."

He produced a small flint and steel from his escritoire as he spake, and lighted a taper, which Claude held while he sealed the letter and jewels in a parcel. During this operation he continued pressing on Duval the importance of expedition, and made him promise that he would not sleep above one night in France till he returned with his intelligence.

Mervyn was, however, unwilling to part with his glittering toy, and showed undubitable signs of anger when the earl took it from his neck.

"Thou shalt have it again, my child," he said, kissing his wounded brow. "Who knows, Duval? Perchance he may wear it some day with honour among the peers of England, when his unfortunate father's very form has mouldered into shapeless dust. Teach him, Claude, when he is older, how I loved him, dearest when least I seemed to do so. Tell him how his mother wronged me, and then he will

forgive me—perhaps shed some bitter tears over my grave. And now, though your loyal heart needs no oath to bind it, swear to me, Duval—swear eternal fidelity and secresy, if not to me, to my child."

The earl extended the little crucifix before him on the table, and Claude, drooping on his knees, kissed the holy symbol in confirmation of his pledge. He then, at his master's suggestion, ripped a seam in his mantle and sewed the paper and jewels in it, together with half the gold intended for his journey.

The moment of parting had now arrived. Edwards opened the door to announce that Master Lieutenant's officer was waiting to receive the keys of the wards. Aumerle clasped his young child tenderly in his arms, and repeatedly kissed the still bloody wound on his brow.

"God have mercy on me!" he murmured, in a deep undertone, "but this is the first time I did ever embrace this beautiful infant as my son, and my soul bodes it is the last."

Little Mervyn began to cry, and, clinging to the earl's neck, said that he would not leave him, and asked Claude if he might not stay and live with the gentleman if he was a good boy.

"My sweet Reginald," said the unhappy prisoner, in a broken voice, "Heaven forbid that I should chain your bright young destinies to mine, which are setting in such darkness. Go with Claude, my child, but be, as you say, good, and we *shall* meet again."

The earl, unable to speak further, motioned to Claude, who fastened his mantle carefully and bent to kiss his master's extended hand; but the latter wrung his with extreme emotion, and, uttering only "My faithful Duval," took Mervyn's hand and led him to the door.

Edwards and the warder of the keys were waiting in the antechamber, and the latter muttered some observations on the earl's quitting the chamber, but broke off involuntarily, struck by the anguish in his countenance. Aumerle advanced a few steps, proudly striving to conquer his emotion, but a few convulsive sobs burst from him.

"Bid your father farewell, child, your father," said Duval, anxious to put an end to the miserable scene.

"My father, Claude?" said Mervyn, with an innocent look of wonder, "I thought I had no father! Good-bye, papa."

"Farewell, my son! Heaven and thy father's blessing be upon thee for ever!" exclaimed Aumerle, once more clutching the child to his breast, and kissing it with a gush of tears. Then, as if ashamed of his emotion, he set the boy down, and desired Edwards to let them out at the gate below.

Duval pressed his master's hand on his heart, lifted Mervyn in his arms, and followed the old man. In a moment they disappeared down the dark staircase, and the earl returned to his prison.

CHAPTER IV

NELL GWYN'S APPRENTICESHIP

Claude, on finding himself emancipated from the gloomy shadows of the Tower, which seemed to him darker than those of any other building he had ever seen, regained his natural cheerfulness. Not so little Mervyn, although the night was very fine, and brilliant with starlight. Without well knowing why, the child was frightened and melancholy, starting at every shadow of the projecting houses, and anxiously inquiring when they should have a light. Claude carried him still, and sang as he went, rather to amuse the child than from any gaiety of feeling, though his heart was of that elastic sort which leaps up the moment the pressure is past. He seemed to be well acquainted with the part he was traversing, passing through numberless narrow, crooked, and dark streets, until they emerged suddenly on the shore of the river.

London Bridge—*old* London Bridge, crowded with ill-built houses, which sometimes crossed the road on arches—was before him, resting on its innumerable arches, the river flowing placidly beneath. A high battlemented gate defended the entrance, flanked by towers of solid masonry, and furnished with a portcullis and spiked gate of massive timber. The portcullis was already down, but a small wicket, in the right tower, was open for the convenience of passengers, who, after passing the scrutiny of the watch, entered a dark passage which opened on the bridge.

Inquiring for the Aumerle Arms, Claude learned that it was kept in one of the towers—a fact which he had conjectured from an emblazoned shield hung over the portcullis, and a bush of birch hanging beneath a lamp. There was also an inscription in huge letters over the arms, which promised well for the kind of cheer to be met within :—

LODGINGS AND ENTERTAINMENT FOR MAN AND BEAST

Good Beef—good Hay—
Welcome to go—Welcome to stay—
Much to have—and Little to pay.

In this hostel Claude made his way, entering a small courtyard surrounded by a wooden gallery which communicated with all the chambers above, and inquired for mine host of some carriers who were drinking and feeding their horses.

"Do you want the master or the landlord, companion ?" replied one, deliberately taking the pipe from his mouth, and whiffing the smoke in Claude's face.

"Why, the master, to be sure," replied Duval.

"Oh, then *she's* yonder," said the fellow with a laugh, which was echoed all round. "Don't ye see her ? Yon 'oomun a-mucking in the stable ; she's been to see the 'orses rubbed down. Ho, mistress, ye're wanted !"

A short fat puncheon of a woman, with a face as broad as a full moon and crimson with exertion, emerged, at this call, from a stable at hand, holding a pitchfork, which still bore tokens of recent employment. She was attended by a nymph, whose appearance certified the nature of the office she held in the establishment. She was a tall, full, well-turned figure, though characterised by an air of habitual laziness and inattention. Her face was fat, fair, and finely featured, with a rich hazel eye full of wanton moistness, and a sort of voluptuous indolence, which was not without attraction. She seemed good-humoured from the smile on her pouting lips, but, on the whole, there was an air of dormant wickedness and craft spread over her countenance, which seemed only to want opportunity to develop itself in deeds. She was dressed in a blue petticoat and coarse brown bodice, with a straw hat crushed shapelessly upon her head, and tied by a piece of tattered

riband. Her occupation had evidently been holding a lamp, while her more vigorous mistress prepared the stables for the night; and, as she threw its gleam over Mrs. Bradley's thick shoulders to look at Claude, it was clear the wench smiled with no unfavourable sentiments.

"Well, sir, and wot do you want?" was the hostess's courteous query, as she stood puffing and panting, and wiping her face with the back of her hand, the palm being deeply tainted with odoriferous matter.

"Why, Mistress Temperance, how's this? Have you forgotten your old friend and admirer, Claude Duval?" said the cavalier, and presuming on the licence of old friendship, he invaded Mrs. Bradley's plump cheeks with a chaste salute.

"Lawk love you, Mounseer Duval! Save us! the same man, every inch of him!" exclaimed the hostess, smiling from ear to ear, and extending her fat red hand, she buried Duval's in its grasp, wringing it very heartily. "Well, I'm sure! and if you ar'n't as welcome as the flowers of May, call me no honest woman, and my house no better than the Old Swan opposite. And so, Mr. Duval, ye're married at last, and have a family, I see—after all your talkings against mattermony, and what not?"

"Ay, ay, dame; after you disappointed me, I took up with the first that came to hand," replied Claude, with a wink at the grinning maid. "Not that I am exactly married—no man that ever loved you could so far forget what he had lost. But the boy is mine, and nothing to be ashamed of either."

"You are not my father, Claude," said Mervyn, pettishly. "Papa wears velvet and a gold chain—you are not papa."

"Faith, mounseer, the urchin savoureth something too much of my lord's look," said Mrs. Temperance, with an acute nod at Claude. "Well, well, I can see my way in a fog as well as most people. But, good lack! to think how my poor master and lord, that was so main kind to us all, is himself comed now to trouble! Oh, the devils!—it would make a stone sob to hear how he's a-served out by the willainousest wretches wot ever was!"

And Mrs. Bradley burst into a cataract of tears, to the infinite amusement of her attendant, who stretched out her grinning face to an inimitably rueful expression, which almost forced Duval to laugh.

"Ay, Mrs. Temperance! he was a good master to us all, and methinks he hath set you up here handsomely as your deservings, which is saying a wide word," replied he.

"Why, the place is well enough, and a lucky penny it's been to me, the fifty gold crowns my lord tossed to me on my bride-day, if I had not married the laziest, good-for-nothingest, drunkenest little scoundrel as ever drew God's air in thanklessness!" groaned Mrs. Bradley. "But, howsomedever, Master Duval, you're entire welcome yourself to the best in my house, for, be praised, it is mine, and shall be mine to my dying day, as right it should be, seeing the yellows were all mine; for—would you believe it, Mounseer Duval?—the little villain hadn't a ha'penny saved, after all his talk and long service with my lord, who, I'm sure, was not a master to grudge his folks their little pickings. And butler, too!—it makes me sick, sorry, and sad, when I think of what a fool I was to be wheedled by a little, drunken——"

"But where is Mr. Bradley now?" interrupted Claude.

"Where is he always?" said the hostess, throwing the pitchfork against the wall. "Why, even just getting as drunk as a sow with that dare-devil rake-hell of a captain, young Edwards, and all his crew of buccaneers about him. But that isn't what I find fault with—that may be all for the good of the house—but——"

"The very man I want to see," continued Claude, "and that is my business here, Mrs. Bradley, next to seeing your own handsome face. I am going to take my boy to Normandy, to live with my relations there, and Captain Edwards is to take me. Can I see him?"

"Here—Moll Creswold! Where's the jade?" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley, turning sharply round.

"I'se here, missus," replied the damsel, colouring with fear lest the sudden turn had revealed her occupation of making faces at her mistress.

"Show the gemman upstairs, to No. 3, among the sailors," said Mrs. Temperance. "Tell 'em he wants Captain Edwards."

"I will hunt him up myself, dear Mrs. Bradley," replied Claude, hastily. "But I hope you will give us your company at supper over a pottle of sack, to talk of old times. Let us have a stewed chicken, Mrs. Bradley; you were famous at stewed chickens in my lord's time."

The hostess smiled at this flattering compliment, but as Moll Creswold had now obtained a link from one of the ostlers, the conversation was cut short for the present, and Claude followed his fair conductress up a flight of wooden steps to the gallery above. Here, by a sudden gust of wind, the torch was extinguished, and the girl, protesting she was afraid of ghosts, clutched hold of Claude's arm; but his usual gallantry deserted him on this occasion. He shook her somewhat rudely off, and groped his way along a narrow corridor in darkness. Moll, however, darted forward with great agility, and unceremoniously threw open a door before him.

A curious scene presented itself. It was a large, awkwardly-planned apartment, full of projecting cornices and recesses, and nearly half hanging, like a penthouse, over the river. A vast sea-coal fire burned in a chimney of such dimensions that it looked like a black anteroom; and around it, seated at wooden tables covered with beer-jugs, tobacco, arms of various forms, and coarse esculents, sat the most miscellaneous group which Claude, in his wide experience, had ever seen. Some dozen sailors were there, dressed in many varieties of marine costume, but all furnished abundantly with offensive weapons, such as pistols and hangers.

The captain of the band was easily distinguished by the tawdry splendour of his garb, and the general respect paid to him in a rough way. He was a large-boned, vigorous-looking man, about thirty, with a face bronzed by exposure and hardship, features extremely coarse, a clear bold eye, and an expression of honest good-nature and kindness of heart which made his countenance, on the whole, very agreeable. He wore a blue coat, which seemed so richly bedizened, though much faded, that it raised suspicion of having belonged to some naval officer of high rank, ere it passed into the present owner's possession, especially as his scarlet woollen cap and coarse white trousers were by no means of a corresponding character. He had a steel belt stuck with pistols, and a very handsome hanger, somewhat ostentatiously decorated with ribands.

But there was another object which more particularly attracted Claude's observation. Seated on the captain's knee, with one slender arm round his burly neck, sat a young and beautiful girl—beautiful in spite of rags, and

the few articles of tawdry finery which she had contrived to decorate herself withal. She seemed scarcely sixteen years old; her figure was light and very graceful, though somewhat low, and her face might have served a painter as a model for Hebe, so fair, fresh, and sparkling with gaiety and good-humour was its every line. Her dress was of the most tattered and poverty-stricken description, but even her rags were arranged with intuitive grace. She wore a short yellow petticoat, patched with all the colours of the rainbow, and a bodice so ragged that the fine turn of her neck and its whiteness were but too visible. Clusters of natural ringlets of the purest gold, which she had twined with some flowers, shaded her fair face. A basket of oranges and a string of ballads beside her, seemed to denote the girl's occupation, and when Claude entered, she was singing some sea ballad to suit the taste of her auditory, but with so sweet and rich a voice, that a king's ear need not have disdained it.

Not far from this group sat a little man on a stool, with a large fat face, a nose of extraordinary dimensions, and small twinkling eyes, who seemed listening with maudlin tears of delight to the girl's song—jogging himself and a brimful tankard of ale to keep time.

Claude's entrance obviously disturbed the good meeting. The song ceased, and the songstress made an effort to spring from the sailor's knee; but he pulled her back, with a rough "D—n it, Nell, what's the go now? art afeard, girl?"

"Not of me, I hope, sir," said Duval, with a flourish of his hat.

"No, nor o' th' devil himself when Jack Edwards is by, let alone a French jackanapes!" replied the captain, with a fierce survey of Duval's person and accoutrements.

"Faith, Jack, the gentleman is not a man to frighten one," said Nell, for such was her name.

"I am able to take mine own part, pretty damsel, yet I thank you," said Duval. "But Captain Edwards mistakes me; my business is with him: you, perhaps, know this signal."

He whispered a word in Edwards's ear, which seemed to produce a great effect; and exclaiming, "Lord love you! so you're come at last! welcome as Torbay in a gale!" he sprang up, and shook Claude's hand very heartily.

Nell took the opportunity to transfer herself to a stool near the fire, and shading her face with her hand, took a smiling survey of the new guest. The latter, as soon as released from the sailor's rough welcome, gave him a letter, which he turned over and over again without opening.

"The fiend take it!" he said at last, throwing the paper into the fire. "I was never at college, and there's an end of it. But I see it's all right; you are the popisher I'm to take out for ballast. On the skit, eh? And the young 'un is your kid?"

"You are well informed; I am the man—Claude Duval."

"Very well, cast anchor, and take in beef and grog," continued the jolly mariner, a true specimen of the fine old blusterous English sailor before white kid gloves were worn on quarter-decks. "We can't sail before to-morrow, 'cause of the tide—meanwhile, you're d—d welcome, and depend on't Jack Edwards takes you over the herring-pond as safe as a keg of brandy."

"And give me the sweet boy—I will nurse him for you, master. I see he doth not much affect your rough beard," said the girl, extending her arms; and little Mervyn leaped joyously into them. "Ah! how I love him already. How like he is to the Cupid painted over the duke's play-house."

"Why, what ails the boy?" said Duval, smiling, "frightened of a pretty girl, thou milksop?"

"Nay, but I am so cold," shivered the little urchin, creeping closely to the bosom of his young nurse, who, clasping him fondly, and putting her rosy cheek to his, formed unconsciously a group of extreme beauty.

"Ay, warm thee there, thou true chip of the old block," said Claude. "Where should faith be found in this world, if not in a woman's heart?"

"Hollo, Moll!" exclaimed Edwards, "run and bring a can of punch, and tell your mistress to make it smack more of the brandy; I'm sure it don't stand her much in customs. And now, sir, try that 'ere beef—prime Hamburg dried, sir."

"I have ordered a stewed fowl," said Claude.

"What's a stewed fowl to take in for a sea-voyage?" exclaimed the captain. "It may do as a finish-off, like bran over the barrels; but, for a beginning, nothing like a good bottom, say I."

Thus pressed, Claude set to work at the dish before him, and in spite of coarse bread and a dirty cloth, soon found it very appetising. It was curious how quickly he took the tone of the society; he used the slang dialect as if accustomed to it, toasted the ladies, drank with the men, and became in a few minutes a general favourite of all, and particularly of Nell.

Claude was surprised at the vivacity and wit of the young ballad-singer, and she seemed pleased with his sprightly gallantry, a circumstance which by no means delighted Captain Edwards. Jokes not remarkable for decency passed, and Claude remarked with interest that Nell frequently coloured up, as if not quite habituated to the free-and-easy style in conversation.

In the height of this scene Mrs. Bradley entered with the stewed fowl, followed by an idiotic-looking boy, who carried a white stone bottle of brandy, and a silver tankard of sack. These articles were placed before Claude, and pursuant to invitation, Mrs. Bradley seated herself at table with him. Claude asked all around to partake, but all refused, excepting merry Nell, who protested, with an arch smile, that she was tired of salt beef. There was some little difficulty about finding Nell a seat higher than her stool, till Duval bethought him of turning his chair down, so that the sprightly orange-girl and he sat balancing each other, to do which, however, it was necessary at times to catch hold of one another, to keep the scale true, and the whole affair was conducted with such laughter and good-humoured gaiety on all sides, that Edwards grew more and more sullen and silent. Nobody noticed this, however, until Moll Creswold, who had been silently picking a bone and watching, gave him a slap which broke his reverie.

"A penny for your thoughts, my dear," said she, with a knowing smile at Nell Gywn and the courtly valet, who were at the moment jingling glasses together to each other's health.

"It's a cram; I don't care a splash of an oar about her, the slut," said he, contradicting her look rather than her words. "Why, Moll, you're as good-looking as her o' Sundays, and don't change with every wind that blows. Come here, girl, and sit on my knee. I'll give thee them gold earrings with their bright stones which I found on

the drowned lady at Stralsund. I meant them for Nell, but she's better suited."

And, with a glance of huge indignation at poor Nell, he pulled Moll Creswold to him, nothing loth, and triumphantly installed her in the august position indicated. The girl's eye flashed, and she almost snatched the jewels from Edwards as he drew them fiercely out of his breast-pocket.

"Nay, then, if you deprive Mistress Nell of her place she must have another," said Claude, by a gentle movement transferring Nell to his own knee.

The girl laughed musically, and for a moment Edwards looked seriously inclined to pick a quarrel, but, on second thoughts, continued sullenly smoking his pipe.

"Come now, darling Nelly, this is all nonsense," said mine host, speaking for the first time, in a subdued tone, as became the helpmate of Mrs. Temperance Bradley. "Do give over your skitting, there's a fine woman, and sing the captain that song wot you were going on with when mister what's-his-name came in."

"Shall I, Jack?" said the girl, smilingly parting Mervyn's hair, who, having eaten his fill, resumed his place on her lap, for she had extricated herself from Claude.

At this moment the loud jangling bell of the inn-yard was heard, and Moll Creswold was obliged to resign her new honours to answer it.

"Do what you like, girl; you're not what I took ye for," growled Edwards, puffing his tobacco very fiercely. "Do what you like; it's nothing to me."

"Nay, then, I should slap you on the face for spoiling your good looks for nothing," said Nell, playfully. "But now, Jack, you don't pretend to like Moll Creswold half so well as me?"

"Why, Nell—zounds! you know there's nothing on earth I loves better than you, when you behaves yourself like a lady," said Edwards, looking up with a somewhat brightened expression.

"Well then, Jack, I'll sing you your favourite song, and we'll be friends again," said Nell, extending her hand, which the honest sailor let his pipe fall to grasp, and wrung it so hard that she screamed out, half laughing at the same time. She was then opening her little ruddy mouth to

sing, after bespeaking attention with a smiling glance around, when Moll Creswold re-entered, followed by a tall stranger.

CHAPTER V

THE GREAT FIRE

The new guest at the Aumerle Arms entered, making a profound bow. He was wrapped in a large white woollen cloak and hood, with his hat slouched down to his eyes. He was armed with a blunderbuss and sword, and altogether resembled one of the city watchmen, who, at that period, wore a peculiar costume.

"Don't disturb yourselves, ladies and gentlemen," said the stranger, in a deep hoarse tone. "I am a cove in difficulties, and this here warm covering is borrowed without leave from a gentleman whom I knocked down for following me too close, when I didn't want to salute my acquaintances."

Duval was disagreeably struck with some of the tones in the man's voice, which also seemed, somehow or another, counterfeited. He turned and remarked, without any pleasure, a pair of glittering eyes fixed upon him; the rest of the countenance was concealed.

"Don't be afraid, captain," said Moll, smiling with a good deal of malicious meaning. "The gemman is a real flash swell, but gover'ment and he can't agree about some little matter; I think they want to grab his scrag, and he don't encourage the ideer—that's all, eh, Tom?"

"That's all, and enough too," replied Tom, with a hoarse laugh. "I hear they've prepared apartments for me in Newgate, and a chaplain; but I ain't so fond of taking mine ease in irons. They've hunted me out of Whitefriars itself—curse 'em!—and one of the bloodhounds would have nabbed me last night, as I took a ride out by Hounslow, but for this old barker of mine. Molly, my dear, bring me a pipeful of that ere bitter backy, and a pot of brown George, and I'm snug for the night."

So saying, the worthy drew a stool behind a projection of the fireplace, and there seemed to give himself up to

the undisturbed enjoyment of the restoratives he had ordered.

Claude's attention, however uneasily called to this personage, was now diverted by Nell, who asked if he liked sea-songs. Claude gallantly replied that he liked anything she liked, and solicited her to fulfil her promise, and sing. The girl then began in her sweet musical tones, glancing from Claude to Edwards with eyes brimful of comic humour.

NELL GWYN'S SONG

The sea, the sea is England's,
And England's shall remain,
Tho' the might of France and the world advance
To contest our ocean reign!
Quoth gallant Blake, as he spread his sails
And his cannon shook the waves;
Fire away, boys! for the day is ours,
Or here, lads, foam our graves.
Fire away, boys! quoth he again,
For the sea, the sea is England's,
And England's shall remain!

The fresh winds blowing loud and strong,
The Spaniards fled—which rare is—
And we chased them far, and we chased them long,
Till they anchor'd in Canaries.
Quoth our Admiral, as their castles blazed
With guns, like a stormy night,
Do they think to frighten us? fire away, boys,
For old England's might and right!
Fire away, boys! quoth he again;
For the sea, the sea is England's,
And England's shall remain!

We sunk, and burned, and we took them all,
With gold and spices laden,
And our sweethearts each had a jolly haul,
For each loved his English maiden;
But as home we came—quoth our Admiral,
I'm going, lads, aloft!
And he died with a smile, but his dying word
Was, Fire away, boys! now board her, soft!
Fire away, boys! quoth he again,
For the sea, the sea is England's,
And England's shall remain!

"What dost thou call that song, lass?" said Edwards, wiping his eyes. "Lawk-a-mercy! I recollect old Blake as plain as a pikestaff, and good reason I should, for says he to me one day—it was the day we licked the Dutch

off Portland—I was but a youngster then, and had never been in action afore. Says he to me,—I was a-standing near my gun, and my teeth chattering, like most green things afore they've seen a reg'lar good set to—says he, 'Now mind, Jack, stick to your gun, for if you don't, younker, I'll blow your brains out!'—and then he turns away, and if I didn't see him wipe his eyes in his sleeve my name isn't Jack Edwards—that's all." And he smoked away with great vehemence.

"'Tis called Blake's last cruise—here 'tis, in the Ever Green," said Nell, producing a ballad.

"I'll buy one of thee, Nell, and there's the ransom," said the captain, clutching the ballad, and tossing the songstress a gold doubloon.

"You have it now—an old song for your money," said Moll Creswold, with a tart laugh,

"And I'll have another, though it cost me double," said Claude Duval.

"You shall have one for nothing," said Nell, with a provoking smile at Edwards.

"Hark ye, Mr. Dooval," said Edwards, swallowing his punch in one huge gulp, and looking as if he could almost cry. "Ye're a foreigner, and I hears that you cursed French frogs don't understand the proper English way of boxing, but you're great hands at the sword. Now I don't pretend to know more of that sort of thing than a reg'lar downright cut-and-come-again, and you, I suppose, know all the dancing tricks of fence; but, as I was a-saying, wot was it?—why, d—n me, if I stand it, that's all."

"Bravo, Jack! go it, salt 'un!" shouted the gentleman in the woollen cloak.

"And I'll begin by making an example of you, sir, for interfering where you have no concern. Well, Mr. Dooval, will you 'cept my proposition?"

"Are you mad, captain, or do you forget whence or why I come?" said Claude.

"Why don't Nell, then, pay me proper attention, as she ought," said the captain, ruefully. "A'n't I a-going to marry her some day?"

"Come, come, let's all be friends and comfortable. Help us, what have we to do to quarrel?" said the little host, his eyes overflowing with maudlin tears. "Come,

come—agree, agree, and grace'll come upon ye; and let's have another bowl of punch, wife."

"It's Sunday morning," said the muffled guest, in a tone of mock sanctity, which made the company laugh heartily.

"What matters that?" said Edwards, jovially, for Nell had resumed her place beside him, taking care, however, to place Mervyn between them. "We'll have another bowl for a parter; they'll not grudge us a little pleasure in heaven, seeing they've so much of it there themselves."

This argument was considered decisive, and Mrs. Bradley, who had fallen into a deep snore, was roused to prepare another bowl of the exhilarating nectar. But at this moment Moll rushed in, wild with joy, to announce that most delightful of all spectacles to a London mob—a great fire. There was really something fiendish in the girl's delight as she announced the greatness of the mischief. "The fire had broken out at Master Farryner's, the king's baker; the houses on each side were in a blaze, and the engines could not play for want of water, so that a glorious bonfire was expected."

This was enough. The whole society instantly arose, and some ran out, while others threw open the windows. Among the latter were Claude and the gentleman in the woollen cloak. The river and sky in the direction of the fire were illuminated by a broad blaze over which the church of St. Magnus, at the top of the hill, seemed like a gigantic spectre coming in clouds of darkness. The bells of many churches were ringing an alarum; people were running in all directions, watermen driving their wherries towards the shore, everything in commotion. This was irresistible; hosts and guests all poured out. Claude snatched up little Mervyn, offered his arm to Nell, who gladly accepted it, and they joined the general rush. As he pressed down the stairs he thought he felt some one clutch him by the cloak, but the grasp was loosened instantly, and turning, he saw Tom the highwayman pushing past. Supposing it might be accidental, Claude hastened on, and, crossing the bridge, had no need to inquire his way to the scene of destruction.

CHAPTER VI

THE PURSUIT

Nearly all Fish Street was in a blaze. In spite of every exertion which the cumbrous engines of the time, worked by the inhabitants, could make, the whole street seemed one vast mass of flames. These were rapidly spreading. A whirlwind of smoke and sparks was driving down the hill towards London Bridge. A strong east wind seconded the violence of the flames, and the wooden houses, filled with timber and marine stores, seemed like prepared fuel.

A large crowd watched the progress of these events; yells, screams, shouts for help, resounded on every side, but the great mass looked on in stupid amazement. The distracted inhabitants were endeavouring to save their goods, and all was the wildest confusion. A few constables appeared, but they also seemed out of their senses, and did nothing but vainly exhort the crowd to order. The confusion was too great to permit Nell to keep her protector's arm; he saw her forced away in the crowd, without the power of resistance. But shortly afterwards he perceived her standing beside a dashing cavalier, who was laughing and shouting at the flames.

The conflagration continued with increased fury, and Claude, with emotions of awe, heard the shout which announced the appearance of flames from the steeple of St. Magnus. In a few minutes, the whole church was in one vast blaze.

Meanwhile shouts of "Fire!" resounded over the whole city, and the population began to pour out in every direction, mad with mingled fear and curiosity, for rumours were now heard that the Catholics had formed a plot to burn London, and a mad fanatic rushed through the streets, yelling, "God's great judgment! London is falling, London is fated! Nothing can save the Jezebel of cities! Lo, the Lord blows the flames with the great bellows of His winds!"

The arrival of the Lord Mayor and a small division of the trainbands seemed only to add to the general distraction.

In a short time the fire had increased so terribly that all Thames Street seemed in one continued blaze. The riot and confusion which prevailed began to make it dangerous even to look on, especially for a foreigner, as rumours were afloat that either the French or Dutch, with both of whom we were then at war, had concerted a plan, with the Jesuits, to sack and burn London. Claude grew apprehensive for his own and the boy's safety, and thought it would be more prudent to regain his inn, and seek out Edwards. But to his surprise and consternation he found that the fire had worked round, and that several houses on the bridge were already in a blaze.

For some minutes he was in doubt what to do, but finding himself already an object of suspicious scrutiny to several muffled men about him, he thought it best to beat a retreat. Accordingly he made his way down an obscure alley leading to the river, intending, if possible, to get a boat; but he had scarcely stumbled half-way down the uneven causeway, ere he felt himself seized by the collar behind, and a voice which made his heart leap, shouted, "Stop, rogue!" Turning sharply at this ominous greeting, Claude perceived the gentleman in the woollen cloak, whose appearance had already excited his suspicions.

"*Diable! que voulez vous?*" exclaimed Duval, in his first surprise, and fumbling confusedly for his sword; but the stranger was too sharp for him, and seized his wrist in such a gripe that, embarrassed as he was with the child, he felt it useless to attempt resistance.

"Don't struggle, it's of no use," said the captor, very coolly, and raising the flap of his hat, he revealed the countenance of Colonel Blood. "And now you know me, I suppose you have no objection to go with me before a magistrate? I have a warrant—here it is—to arrest you as a French spy. I have plenty of assistance at hand, so you had better go quietly at once."

"It is impossible; you have mistaken your man," said Claude.

"Fal-de-ral!" replied the colonel. "Are you not my Lord Aumerle's French valet? Surrender, or I blow your brains in the gutter. You know me, I see, by your quaking eyes. No more humbug, but come along."

"I will not stir a foot. I tell you, colonel, you are

mistaken," said Claude, unawed by the pistol presented at his head. "Fire, if you dare; it is murder."

"That child in your arms protects you, fool, or we would jump that," grumbled Blood, dropping the muzzle. "We must try another way with you. Ho! Hill, Green! dogs! where are they?"

He touched the spring of a rattle, which gave a peculiar sound, probably well understood by his confederates, and three or four men, dressed as constables, and well armed, ran down the court. Blood then, by a sudden movement, endeavoured to seize the child, shouting to his comrade to aid; but dexterously taking the opportunity to release his hand, Claude retreated a few steps, drew his sword, and made a blow at his antagonist, which cut the hat off his head, and grazed his brow.

"Why, then, have at ye! To hell, French dog!" shouted Blood, firing his pistol.

Luckily, in the darkness and hurry of his aim, the bullet passed Claude, who, meanwhile, shouted "Murder!" "Robbery!" "Help!" with all his might. In a moment Blood, observing the ill success of his shot, drew his hanger, and rushed to the attack. His satellites followed his example, and in a few seconds Claude was driven with his back against a door, where he stood resolutely defending himself.

Some of the inhabitants of this dark region, hearing his cries, put their heads out of window and joined the outcry, without attempting any assistance. Blood, however, continued exhorting his assassins not to hurt the child, and their fear to do so did Claude yeoman's service. Nevertheless, the combat must have been very briefly decided, as, though perfect master of his weapon, it was impossible to withstand such odds, when a new ally suddenly appeared.

"Shiver my timbers!" shouted the voice of one coming up the alley, "five to one!—it isn't fair. What, Mounseer Dooval! Stand to it, sir, and Jack Edwards is your backer."

A vigorous arm, wielding a cutlass, followed up this address, which cut one of the ruffians down, and Claude heard a whistle, evidently blown in the agitation of the combat. He was now engaged hand-to-hand with Blood, the child screaming and clinging round his neck, embarrassing his movements, though in some measure protecting

him. The whistle produced a similar effect to the rattle in summoning new combatants, but on the contrary side. A number of sailors appeared at the entrance of the alley, who, seeing their captain engaged, instantly knew which side to take, and rushed to the rescue. The superiority of numbers was now on Claude's side, and even the ferocious Blood, observing his men fly in all directions, found it impossible to keep the field, and ran off, shouting for help in the king's name, and raising the terrible view-halloo, "A popish spy! a popish spy!"

Claude knew that this call would not long remain unanswered, and after hurriedly thanking Edwards for his opportune aid, which the generous seaman swore was only what he would have done to any man in similar need, let alone his freight, they consulted about what was best to be done. Edwards, who had a sailor's dread of meddling in matters where the law seemed to thrust herself, advised that they should all get on board his vessel as fast as possible. Claude agreed in this opinion, and they ran to the water's 'edge, where, at Edwards's shout, "Sculler! sculler!" a small wherry shot from behind a vessel towards them. Claude, Edwards, and little Mervyn, with two of the sailors, leaped in, and rowed out into the middle of the river to get clear of the numberless boats and barges rushing about.

This attempt was, however, soon found a failure. The waters near London Bridge were crowded with every description of craft, barges, boats, rafts, floating furniture, casks, timber, bedding, as if a great fleet had suffered wreck some short time previously.

Claude, who felt certain that Blood's design was not on him but on his young charge, grew every instant more nervous at the delay. He represented to Edwards that their pursuers would undoubtedly overtake them on the river, where resistance would be impossible. He therefore thought it would be best for the captain to land him, and bring his own barge to meet him at the Tower Stairs as early as possible in the morning. This plan was thought feasible, and executed instantly. They drove their boat on the sands near London Bridge, and Claude made the best of his way through back lanes to Eastcheap, while Edwards went in a contrary direction to fulfil his part of the contract.

Stepping into an obscure inn, Duval ordered wine and bread for breakfast, and, snugly ensconced in a dark corner, listened to the various and conflicting reports of the numerous visitants. He heard that the fire was raging with increased fury—that all attempts to stop its progress were vain—that the lord mayor was out of his senses—that Sir John Robinson and the guards from the Tower were parading the streets—and that the burning houses were ransacked, as if in a city given up to pillage.

As to the cause of the conflagration, opinions differed with every individual—the French, the Dutch, the Jesuits, having each their vehement partisans. Unable at last to sit quiet, with his mercurial blood, while a whole city was in commotion, Claude borrowed an old cloak of the landlord, and sallied forth again into the tumult.

The morning was just breaking, but the denseness of the smoke, and the fiery darkness of the atmosphere, made the dawn unnoticed. Soldiers of the city bands were stationed in the streets to prevent the masses from rushing up and down; but all subordination was now at an end; no man heeded authority or entreaties; terror had broken the bonds of fear and reverence, and society seemed resolving itself into its first wild elements.

Claude observed some few who still kept their senses endeavouring to pull down the houses adjacent to those already in flames; but the mass of fire driven in tremendous billows before the wind defied all their efforts. The wooden houses, whose projecting balconies furnished a ready-made train, continued to blaze away; and as their owners were principally dealers in oil, pitch, tar, brandy, ropes, and timber, the conflagration frequently burst out into raging furnaces of the most beautiful white and coloured flames. Men's ruling passions seemed now heightened to delirium. Some cursed and howled imprecations over their ruin, others knelt in the muddy street, sung hymns, and prayed with frantic enthusiasm, as if the end of the world were come.

Thames Street was now reduced to a heap of red-hot ruins; Gracechurch Street was all ablaze, and the two great lines of houses on each side, Lombard and Fenchurch Street, had caught the fiery contagion. Churches, the flaming giants of the scene, towered over the ocean of fire, blazing to their very summits.

At this time the conflagration had assumed the shape of an immense bow of fire, and the same fanatic who had previously harangued the crowd pointed this out to them.

"Behold the bow, no longer the bow of promise, but of destruction!" he exclaimed, with frantic vehemence. "Behold the presage, not of water, but of fire; not of mercy, but of utter uprooting; not of pardon, but of wrath, for ever! The arrows of God are flaming in it! Woe to thee, London! Sodom of cities! Who shall stand in the gap for thee?"

Escaping from this madman and the intense heat of the surrounding flames, Claude thought that he had best make his way to the Tower, to meet Edwards. But he soon found himself baffled in this plan. Soldiers were in possession of all the outlets to the shore, and refused, in spite of all his representations, to let him pass without a written order from the Lord Mayor. The latter functionary he heard was at Whitehall, where the council had met in confusion, to debate on what was proper to be done. Moreover, the idea occurred to Claude that such a request from a foreigner, at that juncture, could produce no other effect than to consign him to a dungeon. Not knowing what else to do, he now strove to return to his inn, but on approaching it, he found it already in a blaze. In this dilemma, concluding that he should be least noticed in the deepest confusion, he followed the sweep of the crowd through the fiery city. Even little Mervyn's terror had now given place to admiration, and when they stopped before the Exchange, which was in one vast blaze, he clapped his hands with a kind of joy.

The hours of this dreadful day passed, in the overwhelming emotion of all men's minds, like centuries in a dream. None kept count, and not a gleam of daylight penetrated the crimson air. The sun, indeed, hung above like a bloody circle, but seemed to give neither light nor warmth. The confusion, the outcries, drowned all recollection.

Claude, like the rest, was insensible to the passage of time. He wandered about amidst the confusion, stunned and stupefied by the noise and cries, and the universal terror, but no one seemed to heed him. The streets were choked with furniture and goods from the burning houses; carts laden with the more precious commodities were locked

and confused together, so as to paralyse all attempts to bring assistance.

Claude stood gazing in mute terror, and almost suffocated with smoke, at the gigantic mass of flames presented by the burning Guildhall, when he felt the tassel of his cloak pulled. He started round, and saw what, in the dense smoke, appeared to be the spectre of a young girl, so pale and ghastly were her features. A moment's attention, however, told him that it was Nell Gwyn, so lately the merriest of the merry. Claude's gallantry had not, however, totally deserted him.

"Sweet Mistress Nell!" he exclaimed, when she interrupted him with an emphatic gesture.

"Don't speak to me that way now, it is too terrible," she exclaimed. "I have just made my escape from that wicked lord with whom you saw me. His name is Rochester, but his blasphemous wit is too horrible. O Claude, do you think this is the day of judgment?"

"If not, we shall not see a worse till it comes," replied Duval.

"And that poor child!" exclaimed the girl, bursting into tears. "But I forget, Claude. I have been seeking you for hours, to put you on your guard. I heard that detestable-looking villain in the white cloak inquiring for you everywhere, describing you exactly; but people are so lost in misery, they can't tell what he means. Ah, good Lord, be gracious! yonder he is."

She pointed through a rush of fiery dust, to a figure standing on a high horse-stone, and apparently shouting while he directed some operations. A glance at his terrible countenance, lighted by the congenial glare of the conflagration, was enough for Claude.

"I must run for it, Nell—my life is on a cast, and the child's too," he exclaimed. "But if you would merit Heaven's pardon for any little sin of yours, do an act of charity for me. You will find Edwards waiting me at the Tower Stairs. The sentinels will let you pass. Tell him to go on to Whitehall, and be there by ten to-night, if it is not that already."

"I will," said Nell, resolutely; "but look to the child, Claude, he is white as snow."

Duval, then, fearful of attracting his persecutor's eye, gratefully pressed the girl's hand, leaving a moidore in it,

and vanished before she could return it, as she wished to do.

News that both sides of Cheapside were on fire, turned the great stream of gazers in that direction, and Duval joined it. The mob was arrested in its progress near Mercer's Chapel, by the sudden pouring in of four simultaneous fires, which here met as in a common reservoir. Threadneedle Street, Walbrook, and Bucklersbury now lay open, and immense vistas of flames were revealed by the fall of all the intervening houses. The roar of breaking timbers, the dust, the smoke, the suffocating smoulder, were succeeded by a solid mass of flames a hundred feet in height. Raising a yell of terror, the mob rushed past, carrying Claude with it, and he presently found himself one of a vast and silent multitude, gazing on the destruction of the great cathedral of London—the magnificent St. Paul's of Inigo Jones. It was a scene such as an imagination of surpassing grandeur might have dreamed, but no human eye had ever seen before—the sublime of terror. There was a vast mob; but all were hushed into silence of extreme awe. Innumerable faces, pale, haggard, and as if changed into stone, so fixed was their affrighted expression, were turned towards the spectacle.

Claude stood behind a group of horsemen, richly garbed, one only of whom—a tall, olive-complexioned man, with a very brilliant eye—was covered. This personage Claude soon learned was the King; another rider, covered with dust and grime, he recognised as the Duke of York. The cavalier with whom he had seen Nell Gwyn was also near the King, holding the bridle of his horse, which snorted with terror as every gust of wind blew showers of burning sparks among them. A few soldiers, fixed like men of bronze, stood around, but no one stirred—the uselessness of all resistance seemed tacitly allowed.

The heat was now intolerable, and Claude thought that the stones beneath his feet were turning red-hot; but the fascination of terror kept all chained to the spot. St. Paul's—the great St. Paul's, the glory of London—was in flames! The whole summit of the church (for the wind had conveyed the elements of destruction there first) was in a blaze. The galleries were wrapped in luminous torrents; shining volleys of flame burst out every instant in every direction, and baffled all hope of saving the enor-

mous building. The lead was melting like snow before the sun from the vast roofs; the stupendous beams, the enormous masses of stone, were yielding and falling with deafening uproar, and crushing in the roof of the church of St. Faith, which grew like an excrescence on the majestic structure above.

To add to the terrors of this scene, numbers of the sick—some dying of the still-lingering plague—were borne past on their beds or in blankets. One was carried close to Claude, in the last agonies, covered with purple sores, and yelling hideously as he pointed to the flames, "Hell! hell!"

The scene had now attained its highest pitch of horror, and St. Paul's presented for some minutes the appearance of a cathedral built of fire, till at length the roof fell in with a roar like that of the sea breaking on a rock in a storm. All then became one immense pyramid of fire, the flames of which lapped the sky. Yet, even in this terrific moment, Claude heard the King whisper to the cavalier at his bridle, "Oddsfish, man! methinks I only need a fiddle to substantiate the comparison with Nero, which my loving subjects are constantly making."

"Faith, sire, I think this will stop their complaints about the want of fuel," replied the cavalier. "The citizens may roast their dinners here cheap enough."

"Look, Wren! what sort of immortality have you architects?" continued the King, turning to a grave-looking man, in sad-coloured brocade, who seemed attentively watching the conflagration. "See you there! Inigo's magnificent portico is fuel for a bonfire."

"'Tis possible to build one that shall surpass it, sire," returned the architect.

"Will you then be our Michael Angelo, doctor?" replied the King, smiling.

"Yes, an it please your Majesty," replied Wren, smiling too, but with a deep flush and a luminous sparkle of the eye.

At this moment Claude was conscious that some one was looking at him intently, over a wall of the churchyard, on which clustered a throng of the lowest populace. To feel that this gazer was Blood, and that he was detected, was in Claude simultaneous with an attempt to fly. For some minutes, however, the turbulence of the crowd made it

impossible to force a way; but he succeeded at length in reaching an open place. Certain now that he was still pursued, he resolved to make for Whitehall as fast as possible. That he was followed was, however, in a few minutes evident, for as he turned into Holborn—then a long succession of straggling houses and gardens—he heard voices shouting, "Stop him, stop him! A Jesuit! A spy!" and louder than all resounded Blood's dread tones.

These cries seemed to lend Claude wings; leaving the burning city in his rear, he ran, with the child in his arms, over the fields between Holborn and the Strand. Still he imagined he heard voices calling to each other, and the distant tramp of pursuers; and he continued running as fast as his living burden permitted until he reached a stile near the church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Here he ventured to breathe and look round; but his consternation was again excited by observing several men with torches and drawn swords crossing the opposite hedge. To leap the stile and resume his flight was but a moment's thought: still, the pursuers had evidently caught sight of their prey, and renewed the chase with loud halloos.

CHAPTER VII

THE FLIGHT

Collecting his fainting strength with a last effort, Duval continued his course rapidly, and leaving the palace and gardens of Whitehall on his left, plunged down a passage between two dead walls, which led to the stairs where Edwards was to meet him. In a moment his feet were on the lowest step of the landing-place—in vain!—not a living soul appeared; nought but the river was there, rolling in the fiery fog which enveloped all things. He drew his sword, and looked around to ascertain if no less desperate resource presented itself. The balustrade leading to the river had a slight projection, behind which he thought it barely possible to remain concealed; and he ensconced himself in it almost at the same moment that the flash of torchlight appeared on the summit of the stairs. Glancing

upward, he perceived Blood, followed by three or four of his myrmidons; the former waved a torch, and hung eagerly forward, while his ill-omened countenance expressed extreme vexation and surprise. Claude saw that they paused, and entered into eager discussion—Blood persisting that he had seen him run down the steps, another ruffian asserting that he ran on farther.

"He must be drowned, colonel, if he went down here," said one.

"If that's the case, I don't want his carcase to feed my hounds on," replied Blood, sullenly. "But I must be sure the brat's safe—I would not for five hundred pounds he escaped us. Come on, bullies! Your torch, Berry!" and snatching the brand, he moved slowly and circumspectly down the stairs, looking earnestly forward to the water, probably expecting to behold some signs of recent immersion.

Claude's heart beat thick, but he moved not a muscle; and the boy, too, seemed hushed by sympathetic terror. At this moment, the dash of oars was heard, figures approached through the fog, and Claude heard the boisterous voice of Edwards, shouting, "Mr. Dooval! Mr. Dooval!" but music never sounded half so sweet to his ear.

"Here I am—help!—murder!—quick!" shouted Claude, springing up, and rushing down the steps, waving his sword.

"Row, boys, row," yelled Edwards in reply, and with a few lightning strokes of the oar they were close to the shore. Blood, however, recovered his presence of mind in an instant, though struck at first by this sudden apparition, and sprung at Claude, shouting to his men to follow. The subsequent events passed with the bewildering rapidity of a dream. Claude remembered exchanging a sharp clash with his enemy's sword, and that, in his desperation, he threw the child to Edwards, who fortunately caught it in his arms. Then, at the moment when all the ruffians poured themselves upon him, he called to Edwards to row off, and leaped into the water. Blood had, however, clutched his coat firmly, and held him as he buffeted with the water, calling lustily on his men to shoot him.

Edwards dashed the boat back to the rescue, and made a slash at the colonel with his cutlass, but it was parried by Berry. Observing, then, that Claude was nearly strangled by the tightness of the cloak round his neck, he drew his

keen blade across it, severing the skirts from the collar. Some of the sailors instantly dragged Duval on board, almost senseless, and Edwards gave the order to row out. But the cloak—that cloak which contained so many invaluable documents—remained in Blood's hands.

Meanwhile, the colonel, furious at his victim's escape, called to his men to fire on the boat—that they were popish conspirators escaping—and a volley of musketry followed their retreat. Luckily all missed, though the shot rained in the water on all sides, and Edwards, stimulating his men by threats and promises, seized an oar himself, and dashed furiously off. In the distance, however, he heard Blood shouting, "A sculler! a sculler! twenty pounds for a sculler!" A vessel, answering the call, instantly shot from the opposite shore, and Edwards had no doubt but that they should be vigorously pursued.

In the first confusion of his escape, Claude forgot his cloak and everything else; and when he missed it, intense as was his regret, to attempt to regain it would have been madness. Moreover, the extreme danger in which they were quickly absorbed all thoughts but those of self-preservation. A boat, well manned by their pursuers, appeared in the middle of the river in their wake, and the deep hoarse voice of Blood was heard cursing and shouting to the people on the waters to stop the French incendiaries, who were flying from justice. So great, however, was the panic caused by the fire, and men's ignorance of what they had to dread, that no one offered any obstruction.

Nothing could equal the rapidity of the flight but that of the pursuit. One boat followed the other like the bloodhound after his prey. Many shots were fired by the pursuers, but still the hurry and confusion made them all ineffectual; and now, straining every nerve, the fugitives approached London Bridge. Nothing ever surpassed the dreadful magnificence of that spectacle. The sky above was like one vast vault of red-hot brass, in which shone a pale moon; the shores on each side seemed like measureless furnaces, as if, indeed, the whole earth were on fire. The roar of the flames was like that of the sea. All around the bridge appeared like a vast hill of fire, or rather an ocean of flames, which the wind drove into monstrous billows. The terror of the scene and the violence of their exertions chilled the ardour of Edwards's men, and, in spite of his

threats and Claude's entreaties, Blood was obviously gaining upon them as they approached London Bridge.

A sight awaited them there which seemed likely to put a finish to the matter. The bridge was one mass of flames supported on arches of fire; houses were crumbling down, timbers falling and hissing in the water, burning tar-barrels floated past, and almost every description of furniture and goods was tossed madly out of the windows into the river. Beneath and amidst this terrible bower of fire, held up by mere cohesion of red-hot masses, it was necessary to pass if they would escape. Edwards's sailors paused involuntarily on their oars.

It was indeed a tremendous sight; the numberless arches of the bridge, and the blazing houses on it, forming a mass of fire which seemed to tower to the sky itself. On each side, as far as the eye could reach, rolled eddying seas of flame, bounded only by the horizon.

In this perilous moment the native gallantry of the English seaman broke out in all its peerless lustre. "D—n it, lads!" exclaimed the captain, at the pitch of a voice which had often been louder than the sea in a gale; "it shall never be said that Jack Edwards was the man to desert his friend in danger. Pull away, boys; the rascals dare not follow."

The brave seamen raised a hearty cheer, and seizing their oars again, rushed into the blaze.

Blood and his myrmidons rested, awestruck, on their oars, near the entrance of this terrific volcano, probably expecting the destruction of the fugitives. Edwards's boat, and the persons in it, appeared for a moment all crimson in the glare. They reached the burning arch, and as they shot under it, a gunsmith's shop above blew up with a tremendous roar. A whirlwind of black smoke and fire instantly enveloped them, and when it cleared up, boat and voyagers had alike disappeared from the pursuers' eyes. Whether or not they had perished in the rush of ruins it was impossible to ascertain, and Blood, muttering a fearful curse, threw himself back, exhausted, in his barge.

The fugitives themselves, if interrogated, would have been unable to declare by what exertions, or rather by what chances, they escaped; but they found themselves floating like men in a dream, opposite the Tower. Claude's alarms, however, had not subsided, even when in comparative

safety, and though the loss of his precious cloak nearly drove him mad, he felt that all that could be done was to insure the safety of the young boy, thus obstinately menaced. Cheering the exhausted watermen with the promise of a gold doubloon apiece if they renewed their exertions, he and Edwards each seized an oar. The burning shores of the river gave them ample light, but it was only by great skill that they avoided the numberless impediments in the waters.

The tide was in their favour, and they drifted down to Shadwell without difficulty, when once clear of the bridge and wharves. Edwards's barge, well armed and manned, awaited them there. Once on board this craft, they proceeded on their voyage to Woolwich in gallant style; but it was midnight before they leaped on the schooner's deck, and could pronounce themselves safe. Still, Edwards was apprehensive of pursuit, and as the wind served, he raised his anchors instantly, and they shot down the river, at a rate which soon left the earthly Tartarus behind them out of sight.

When morning dawned, *Black Betsey*, as the schooner was called, had dropped far down the river, and all cause for apprehension seemed gone.

The vessel and the crew were both of a kind by no means unusual in those stormy and daring times. It was a tight little schooner, admirably adapted to the dangerous coast-trading in which it was, somewhat unlawfully, engaged; but being originally intended for more peaceful service, it was rather awkwardly fitted with war-gear. Still, it was the fastest sailer and the lightest coaster that ever smuggler coveted, and was the darling and pride of every man on board; indeed, they all spoke of it with a kind of rough affection, as they did of their sweethearts, and would as soon have knocked the man down who doubted the merits of "poor old Black Bess" as him who insulted their ladye-loves. Withal, they were a wild, ferocious sort of fellows, the very rakings of a lawless and disorganised age; men of iron frames and unflinching hearts, whose only law was their captain's will. Even now, though sailing with royal letters of marque, it was doubtful whether the government regarded them as buccaneers or allies; and Edwards showed, by his anxiety to avoid the royal fleet, which lay at the mouth of the river, that he

doubted the light in which he was regarded at headquarters.

Claude found that, splendidly as he was to be recompensed, it entered not into the captain's head to find anything improbable in the account which it had pleased Lord Aumerle to give. Accordingly he himself passed as a popish emigrant, and the boy as his son. Meanwhile his anxieties were all transferred to the loss of the papers, jewels, and part of the money which was to bear his expenses. He consoled himself, however, by the reflection that no blame could be imputed to him, since he had perilled his life to preserve them, and that the earl could soon replace his credentials. Claude, moreover, was of a merry, hopeful nature, and troubled himself little with the dark side of things.

The wind continued very changeable and capricious, but Edwards's skill seized advantage from every favourable shift, and on the evening of the second day they were in sight of the French coast. The sky and the sea mirrored each other's calmness, and were both of a clear deep blue. Calais arose every instant more distinctly, with its grim walls frowning on the edge of the waters. It was not Edwards's intention to land them at the town, whither, on account of the war, he dared not approach ; but he hoisted a Dutch flag, although there was no vessel in sight, and lay off the coast until sunset. A very brilliant moonlight succeeded, and then the captain steered towards a low headland some leagues to the west of Calais.

Every rock and breaker of the coast was as familiar to him as his fields to a villager ; but he waited for several hours, in expectation of some signal from the shore. Claude at last observed a bright green rocket shoot from a projecting rock, which was answered by the display of a red lamp on their mast-head, when he was informed by the captain that the time had arrived to attempt a debarkation, and the two passengers, himself, and a few seamen, got into the jolly boat.

The tide was out, and the sea breaking in a mournful murmur on the green rocks which lined the shore, beneath chalky cliffs of great height. The boats stranded on the shallow reefs very soon, and they were obliged to walk and jump over the slippery rocks until they reached what appeared to be a hole in the cliff, scarce large enough to

admit a single man. Guided, however, by Edwards, they crawled in one after the other, and soon found the hole widen into a spacious sort of passage formed in the chalk, which terminated, to Claude's great surprise, in a cottage belonging to a fisherman in league with the smugglers. This man and his family received Claude with unbounded kindness, both as being recommended by Edwards and being of Norman blood, and they readily agreed to do everything necessary to expedite him on his journey. The captain only stayed to drink a cup of brandy and to exchange a hearty farewell with Claude and little Mervyn, whom he kissed and hugged most affectionately, and then returned to his vessel.

The next day beheld our travellers on their way to Saint Omer, well mounted and armed, though without a passport, Mervyn riding delightedly before his protector. All these good things were procured by a liberal outlay of Claude's doubloons, but he dared not apply for a passport, lest inquiry should be raised. The news of the great fire was already the universal topic in Calais, and Claude desired no questioning on the subject; and, as the police of those days were by no means strict, he easily crossed the frontier and entered Flanders, which was still an appanage of the house of Austria.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPTAIN OATES

It was a fine bright morning, and both travellers were delighted to be once more on *terra firma*; but towards noonday the heat grew so oppressive that Claude found it necessary to seek shelter for a time. The road was skirted on both sides by very rich meadows, and shaded by broad oaks and chestnuts; and, as he had taken the precaution to fill his saddle-bags with such viands as he had deemed good for a journey, he thought they might as well alight and satisfy their appetites, in a pleasant rural way, under the trees. He dismounted, therefore, and turned his horse loose among the green herbage, then, hearing the babbling of a stream at hand, he penetrated a woody ravine on his

left, to seek its cool waters. He had not advanced many yards, however, ere he encountered a bony Rosinante of a horse, tied by the leg to a crab-tree, and browsing with famished eagerness. This made him look forward with some anxiety, and he perceived a man stretched, either dead or asleep, on the grass. A few steps farther, and the deep nasal snore which greeted him showed that the latter was the case.

Duval hesitated as to whether he should retire quietly, or take the society which chance offered. He had all a Frenchman's liking for chatter, but, on the whole, the stranger did not exactly please him. He was of a low, square-set, ill-built form—his neck short and thick, his arms disproportionately long, and terminated by large bony hands. His visage and features were of a peculiar cast, for the mouth was in the centre of the face, and the disproportionate length of the chin gave him the look of a baboon. This natural ugliness, aided by an expression of low cunning, which the features preserved even in sleep, made it one of the most disagreeable faces Claude had ever seen.

The man was dressed in a suit of dilapidated regimentals, such as were worn by the old guard of Cromwell, and armed with sword and pistols. A dirty leather wallet lay near him, and the relics of a banquet, consisting of very coarse esculents, were scattered about; also a grey-hen, or stone bottle, which had contained some sort of strong liquor.

On the whole, Claude thought he would leave the stranger to his slumbers; but it was no longer possible. Mervyn, led by instinctive dislike, lifted a clod, and threw it on the stranger's face. He awoke with a start and a confused curse, and looked around with a pair of small, vicious, pig-eyes, whose expression of alarm almost made Claude laugh. But he civilly explained his purpose in French, and told the stranger that, if it would not interrupt him, he and his little boy would take their dinner in the shade of the fine trees around.

"I understand no French," said the other, doggedly, and in a very coarse voice. "But if you know anything of Aunglish, speak out, and I'll do what I can conscientiously to pleasure ye."

Claude repeated his apology in English, and the stranger having muttered his acquiescence, Claude quietly pro-

ceeded to open his larder, consisting of part of a haunch of venison, and a little keg of the finest brandy, a parting present from his friend the smuggler. Observing that his new companion viewed these preparations not without emotion, Claude invited him to partake and soon found that, whatever he had eaten previously, he had left off with a competent appetite. He drank in proportion, and soon grew very talkative.

The fire of London was, of course, the first topic. The stranger had heard nothing of it, but he listened with great interest to Claude's details, interspersing the narrative with oaths and ejaculations of wonder, and testifying great satisfaction on learning that the Catholics were considered or suspected as the authors of this vast ruin.

"And what do men say of this paupistical Duke of Yoarck?" he said, in his broad manner.

"Do they not consider he is at the boattem—the snake coiled at the root of all this offence? 'Slife! I warrant him he would burn one-half of Aungland to make the other a dunghill of damnable paupishtry!"

"I cannot say I think the duke hath any hand in it," replied Claude; "which were, methinks, as if a man set fire to his own corn to dry it."

"Then, without doubt, it is the Jesuits," said the stranger, accepting, with a nod, the brandy-bottle which Claude offered.

"Prithee, master," said Duval, somewhat sharply, "speak not so disrespectfully of those Christian fathers; we are not now in England."

"Heaven be praised for that same!" replied the stranger; "for of all the accursed places on earth for an honest man to live in—'slife! a man had better be a dog in any other country."

"You have been in the army, sir, I presume, from your attire?" said Claude, inquiringly.

"Ay, ay! in two armies, those of God and those of man," replied the gentleman. "But virtue makes enemies wherever it goes, and mine got me kicked out of both services. You may have heard of me; my name's Oates—Captain Oates."

"Faith! I have heard of one Parson Oates, who was chaplain on board a man-of-war, and narrowly escaped the gallows for practices which——"

"Yes, sir, I am that most injured man; the victim of a foul ploat," interrupted the stranger, coolly supping his brandy, though the practices alluded to were certainly such as might have brought a blush to the devil's own cheek. "The captain and his boocanier crew of reprobates could not bear the wholesome boldness of my holding forth and preaching of the word, wherein I indeed resembled a glorified saint preaching to Lucifer and his fiends; and so they trumped up that lie which, when the day comes, will damn them all to the lowest depths of the bottomless abyss! But they were obliged to avouch my unguiltiness before the commission."

"What scandalous tongues men have!" exclaimed Claude. "I did hear that Parson Oates was only saved from dangling at the yard-arm by tenderness to his cloth, and that he was dismissed the service with every possible dishonour and shame."

"I would I could hear the man that durst say so to my face," said the other, colouring, in spite of the habitual brassiness of his complexion. "But, to prove mine innocence, I may tell you I was received with joy into the army, and by my great courage and massacring of the popish rebels in Ireland, I was made a captain in my company."

"And was there some new conspiracy?" said Claude.

"Troth, no, but my principles were well known, and being good, Protestant, and honest, the Duke of York took some sudden occasion to break me," replied the captain. "Some of my men took it into their villanous skulls to plunder and murder some family or other, in the wild popish country of Carrickfergus, and I was made responsible—that's all."

"And whither do your bad fortunes lead you now, Mr. Oates?" said Claude.

"Nay, faith, I have left my old floundering guide, honesty, behind, and hope to thrive for the loss," said Oates, smiling grimly. "I am on my way to Pauris, where I mean to enter the French King's service; I hear he needs resolute fellows to carry on his war against these marsh-waddlers of Dutchmen."

"But will not your religious principles be against you, Mr. Oates? You are doubtless one of the independent

leaven which Cromwell left in the King's cake?" said Duval.

"'Slife! I'd be a Turk, or worship a brazen calf, for that matter," exclaimed the captain, who was evidently elated with his brandy. "I don't believe one word of all those old trumperies; the devil take me if I care for him. Oh no, we understand all that sort of thing now, all hypocrisy and state tricks. I am not to be bamboozled with a white upturned eye and a whining twang of the gullet. I was a parson myself once, and know that it's all tomfoolery, fal-de-ral-la! Did ye ever hear of a quack taking his own nostrum? ha! ha! ha!"

The captain continued rattling on in this strain for some time; but Claude was rather annoyed than amused by the blasphemies and unseemly anecdotes of his accidental acquaintance, and though by no means very starched in his own principles, he was almost appalled by those of Captain Oates. As their potations deepened, however, each grew more and more confidential, and Claude could not forbear letting some expressions fall which excited the curiosity of his companion.

"Ye say the young kid is yours, Master Dooval?" said the captain, "and as ye can't aiducate him to your mind in Aungland, ye are taking him to those venerable men at —where did you say?"

"Saint Omer," replied Claude.

"But I have a papa in England who is a grand gentleman," said Mervyn, "only he lives in such a dark, big house, close by the water.

"Auy!" replied the captain, with a suspicious glance at Duval, who smiled and patted his lip with his forefinger.

"I comprehend—I comprehend," continued Oates. "The old one is in pound, and this young one is to be driven out of the wolf's way. Varry good—poor lamb! I take an interest in his behalf, Mr. Claude; 'tis a fair child, varry fair, and even as Rauchel mourned over her fruit, calling him Ichabod, which means, in the vernacular, Our Glory is Departed, even so I—but you say you were robbed, robbed in the great fire, Mr. Claude? How in the world—not to ask impertinent questions—do you mean to get on among the Jesuitical rogues without money?"

"Oh, they did not scrape me clean out; I had a fat

purse in my doublet, though they stole my cloak," replied Claude, proudly.

"Well, well, I hope no offence," said Oates; "all I mean to say is, I have already told you I am no cant; I doan't care about making any of your long hobbledy speeches about faith, hope, and charity, which are but the stock-in-trade of hypocrisy and your soul-dealers; if I had, I might have been a sleek evangelical of a rogue still. But this I will say—in short, if you want money, Mr. Dooval, to take the poor little wretch to a safe place, here's my purse, and ye're as welcome to dip your hand in it as my own brother."

And so saying, Oates drew out a long red silk purse, which seemed, from the chink and glitter within, to be tolerably well lined.

"If I wanted it, captain, you should be my Jew among a dozen—but see if I do," said Claude, producing his little bag of moidores, and tossing it somewhat ostentatiously in the air, it fell with a massive jingle. The stranger's whole countenance brightened, and he had some difficulty to suppress the chuckle which involuntarily mounted to his throat.

"The Lord knows, it is well for us the popish hounds in these parts have no reason, from our appearance, to suspect us of such riches," said he, replacing his purse very carefully. "They say these marshes of St. Omer are haunted by all manner of vagabond robbers and thieves, that fear neither Goad nor man; indeed, I doubted strongly whether I should go on or spend the night in the next village, but for your company."

"So you're travelling to St. Omer, too?" said Duval, though not without a moment's suspicion.

"Yes, sooth; I have diverged from my direct route of Paris to visit the poor scattered remnant still left there by the merciless councils of the ungodly paupistical Ahasuerus on the throne of France," replied Oates.

Claude glanced at the short uncomely figure before him, and contrasting it mentally with his own fine athletic person, consented to the arrangement. They continued their conversation for some little time longer, till Claude observing the trees shot with a deep crimson, admonished his companion that it was time to mount and resume their journey.

The travellers were soon again on the road, a wild-looking horse-path, traversing the heart of a deep forest, and Oates had some difficulty in making his bony hack keep pace with Claude's good steed; but the latter, as if from politeness, took care to keep his companion abreast, and never suffered him to get in the rear.

The conversation was such as the gloomy scenery around naturally excited, and the robberies, murders, and various acts of violence exercised on the road they were traversing, of course formed the staple. Oates pretended to laugh at these stories, but the numerous black crosses skirting the road, each the memento of some act of barbarity, argued well on the other side. From this topic he launched into a dissertation on weapons, and boasted his own to be the best ever made. To back this assertion, he handed his pistols to Claude, who remarked, with a slight smile at his own inward thoughts, that they were not loaded. He handed them back, with a great increase of confidence, and the dialogue became once more free and cheerful. Oates, in his turn, admired his fellow-traveller's defensive gear, and asked permission to examine the temper of his sword. Claude very readily drew the blade, and, flashing it round his head, handed it to the captain, who, apparently by accident, let it fall. Oates made as if he would have dismounted to pick it up, but Claude, with thoughtless politeness, insisted that it was his fault, and, flinging the reins to his companion, leaped to the ground, leaving little Mervyn on the horse.

The point which our travellers had now reached was the descent of a hill, covered by the forest they were traversing, and which commanded an extensive view of a sloping woodland, terminated by the wide marshes of St. Omer. The sun was nigh the horizon, but the whole west still glowed with exquisite colours, darkly reflected in the watery moors which spread in wide desolation beyond. Not a living thing, no human dwelling-place, was visible for many miles round; only a few wild-fowl fluttered over the pools and reedy islets of the marshes, and the towers of the abbey of Clairvaux gleamed in the distance. To the far east, indeed, the eye could discern the walls and pyramidal steeples of St. Omer, rising on an eminence which terminated the view, but distant several leagues. It was a spot well suited, by its solitude, for the commission of deeds of

treachery and assassination, and the thought occurred to Claude almost as he stooped to lift the sword. An exclamation of the child, and a slight start of his horse, induced him to spring up suddenly—but it was too late. The captain had seized the pistols from his holsters almost as he leaped down, and now presenting them at their owner's head, very coolly invited him to give up his purse, or prepare to have his brains scattered among the trees.

Claude was startled, but after the first moment of surprise he began laughing, as if it were a joke.

"Come, sir, none of your horse-grinning at me!" exclaimed the captain, fiercely. "I tell you, you are a fool, and in my power—I am a gentleman of the road. Your money or your life!"

"*Morbleu!*—and is it possible you are in earnest?" said Claude, with imperturbable serenity.

"Never more so," returned the captain. "I don't want to redden a bullet in you, if I can help it; but you must be quick and make your election."

"Never fear," replied Claude, with unruffled composure. "Do your worst—fire away!—the pistols are not loaded. Do you think I was so young as to trust a gentleman of your appearance and conversation? I did but tempt you, to discover your real character—and here it is!—the balls are drawn."

The captain glanced for a moment at Duval, with a mixture of doubt and fear in his villanous eye, still levelling the pistols, but the unalterable coolness of Claude's manner produced its effect. He burst into a laugh, and quietly poking the pistols back into the holsters, exclaimed, "Egad! a young fellow of infinite courage! Loord help us! and did you really think me in earnest, companion?"

"Faith, and I should have found you in earnest, too, had I not been of better nerve than thou art, villain!" said Duval, clutching his pistols eagerly. "I see thou art one of those dastardly murderers that do entrap men to their ruin with caresses, like that Judas who is your patron fiend. The pistols *are* loaded, and for a proof, here is a ball through your hat; the next shall be through your head if you refuse, in your turn, to surrender that goodly red purse, which I will bestow in charity."

Suiting the action to the word, he fired, and was somewhat surprised, knowing that he had only carried off Oates's

ragged feather, to see him fall to the ground, as if shot dead. After pacifying his restive horse, which began rearing and nearly threw little Mervyn, Claude turned to the fallen highwayman, and giving him an energetic kick, called upon him to rise. The wretch, however, had the beetle's instinct, and feigned to be either dead or insensible.

For a moment Claude hesitated as to the propriety of effectually disabling him from further wickedness; but a natural aversion to violence, and even loathing of the treacherous villain, determined him to spare his life. Convinced, however, that he had no rightful claim to the property in his possession, Claude ransacked his pockets with great diligence. He found some gold and jewels of considerable value in his breast, and the red purse; there was also a long knife, and a knotted handkerchief, stained with blood, which Claude had no doubt had recently done yeoman's service. He also found a leaf torn out of an old *London Gazette*, in which he read an exact description of the captain's person and a reward of twenty guineas offered for his apprehension on a charge of swindling some tradesmen.

Claude very kindly left him this certificate of respectability, and mused for some moments as to what he should do with his captive. He finally determined on tying him hands and feet, and leaving him to the compassion of any good Samaritan who might be tempted by the reward to take him into custody; a plan which was no sooner thought of than adopted, infinitely to little Mervyn's amusement.

The captain only groaned once as Claude kicked him over. Then having broken the flints of Oates's pistols, thrown them into a ditch, and let his Rosinante loose to feed on the rank grass, Claude remounted and galloped off at a good speed.

The sunset was rapidly fading into a bright silvery night when Claude entered the ancient Flemish city; the toils of the day were over, and a gay population filled the streets. It was the glittering era of the Grand Monarque, and besides, it was evidently a *fête* day in St. Omer. There were bonfires in the streets, the shrines were decorated with flowers and lamps, short petticoats and gaudy caps appeared on lightsome forms at every turn, blue and red stockings were the only wear. The peasant girls' wooden clogs were painted

all sorts of pretty colours, and their smart garters hung roguishly down to their ankles. Dancing was going on in every open space, and Claude heard no sounds but those of music and laughter.

Inquiring of one of the merrymakers the way to the Jesuits' College, he was readily directed, and shortly found himself in front of the antique and massive edifice—the forge of the Romish Church's chief thunderbolts in that day.

CHAPTER IX

THE JESUITS

The Jesuits seemed to share the public hilarity of the day, for their convent gates were open, and the good brothers were engaged in distributing wine, cakes, and curdled milk to all who chose to partake—not to mention sprigs of holy rosemary, good against charms, storms, and the headache, they having been blessed by the Sovereign Pontiff himself.

Duval inquired of a girl, who was arranging her hair after the dance, for the Reverend General de Oliva, who he had heard was on a visitation to the college. The girl pointed to a chestnut-tree of extraordinary luxuriance, just before the college gates, whose foliage, tinged with the scarlet-brown hues of autumn, formed a sort of hanging tent almost to the ground. Beneath this was a bench of twisted branches, and a rustic table spread with fruit and wine, at which sat an old but vigorous man, in the Jesuit garb, and several gentlemen of the province—probably of high rank, from the richness of their dress.

The general himself wore a purple cross woven in his habit, and a rosary of golden beads. His features, though somewhat harsh and saturnine by nature, were subdued almost to beauty, by a mild and noble expression of genius and goodness. There were times, indeed, when an indescribable something in the eye, a peculiar tone of the voice, or an unguarded gesture, showed that it was not apathy, but subdued passions, which gave him that gracious serenity. At this moment, however, the padre seemed absorbed in enjoyment of the merry scene before him, smiling and

bestowing his blessing on the happy peasants, as they crowded to offer him nosegays of sweet flowers and reverential homage. Among these sprightly masses Claude Duval made his way very deftly, elbowing the men, and handing the girls aside.

"What man is this, or rather, what peacock?" said the general, turning with a smile to his companions.

"From his flaunting livery he should be of Provence, where the hot sun makes them dote on rich colours," said one of the addressed. "But methinks he is courteous as a new noble shuffling his way to the throne through men whose patents date from Charlemagne."

"And mine dates earlier, monsieur," said Claude, bowing reverently. "The Duvals came in with Rollo, and though our family is somewhat reduced, we still keep our pretensions to half Calvados, with absolute possession of some seven acres. Most reverend father, your blessing on this little traveller and myself." And he knelt at the general's feet.

"Who and what art thou, son, that thy introduction is so brief?" said the Jesuit. "And above all, what fair child is this?"

"My name is Claude Duval, servant of the most noble Lord Aumerle," replied the traveller. "The child is—is one whom Providence and his unhappy father commend to your holy protection."

"How—Lord Aumerle! Explain yourself, son," said the Jesuit, with a keen and almost startled glance at the boy.

"I cannot before witnesses, even so noble as these Flemish gentlemen," replied Claude. "Messieurs, excuse me; everything I say or do is trammelled with an oath. But that your reverend lordship may not suspect my intelligence of no worth, I would whisper a word in your ear."

This word, whatever it was, seemed to produce a cabalistical effect. The general entreated his guests to pardon him, and rose as if to retire; but one of the principal among them stopped him. "Nay, father, we will dance awhile with these pretty rustics," he said. "We know the importance of news from England at this juncture; and afterwards, if it please you, I would fain interrogate the gentleman upon the fearful fire which has made London a heap of ashes."

Claude bowed, and after a slight remonstrance from De

Oliva, the gentlemen retired, and mingled with the rural dancers, among whom their glittering garbs and superior elegance seemed the only distinctions they assumed.

"And now thy business?—from the earl? Is he still in the Tower?" exclaimed the Jesuit, eagerly. "Alas! how the world changes. He was of my best-loved friends."

"To begin, then, my lord, I have lost all my credentials, papers, jewels, documents—I know not what—from my master to your reverend lordship," said Claude.

"A brief confession. How and when?" said De Oliva, a shade of suspicion crossing his brow.

"At the great fire," said Claude. "But it will take me some good half-hour to explain all fully, when I shall not appear blameable in your lordship's sight. Meanwhile, do you receive no assurance from the child's aspect?"

"Is this, then, the young disinherited, Aumerle's doubtful son, whom his last letters taught me to expect?" said the Jesuit, anxiously.

"Look on him, sir. Doth not the grape flavour of the vine?"

"Certes, he much resembles my unhappy friend. But your story?" said De Oliva, extending his hand to the child. "Come hither, son. Alas! but his beauty partakes much of his bad mother's most exquisite perfection. Well, your story?"

"Beseech you pardon, if I first moisten my dust-choked lungs in a goblet of wine," said Claude, very coolly filling himself a tankard.

The padre assented with a smile, and Claude swallowed a hearty draught, taking care to leave a few bright drops for Mervyn, who seemed to taste it with infinite relish. He then began, as he had promised, with a circumstantial narrative of those particulars with which the reader is acquainted, from his interview with Aumerle in the Tower to his arrival at Calais. But he did not seem to think it necessary to mention his recent affair with the highwayman.

The Jesuit listened with deep attention, casting frequent glances of compassion at Mervyn; and when Claude concluded his narrative the general sat for some minutes in reverie, then, smoothening the boy's fair locks, he sighed deeply.

"Your tale needs no vouchers, Duval," he said at last. "But the loss of all those precious documents—and in such

hands—is indeed grievous. What if the infuriate parliament and populace should glut themselves in the earl's blood? No proof, no testimonies remain in our hands."

"It shall be remedied when I return to my lord, which I purpose instantly, if your reverence accept the charge I have brought," said Claude.

"I do, as if directly tendered me by Heaven," said the Jesuit. "God have mercy on that cruel woman! I did ever warn the earl that—methinks I may trust thee, Claude?"

"With anything but a pretty girl," said Claude.

"Or a goblet of wine," added the Jesuit, smiling thoughtfully. "Well, it matters not, yet methinks this whole affair is stranger than aught that ever I saw or read, though in my young days I was fond of the wild romances of this besotted age. You are bound to secrecy, Claude?"

"By so many oaths that purgatory would be too good for me if I broke one," said the traveller.

"I married them at Bruges during the King's exile; and what a change is this!" continued the padre, musingly. "Poor Aumerle!—and for such a profligate flaunter and midnight wassailer as Howard was thy noble heart betrayed!"

"And my answer to his lordship?" said Claude, earnestly.

"The earl desired me to return only verbal answers to his messages," replied De Oliva. "The care which he commits to me and to my holy order is, indeed, fraught with awful responsibility. Tell him I accept it with fear and trembling. Assure him, in my name, that all his desires shall be fulfilled to the very letter. I would fain write him a few words of consolation, but that I perceive it may compromise him with his bloodthirsty enemies, if he is discovered in secret correspondence with a poor servant of the Church."

"Your reverend lordship promises then, never, by word or deed, to give this young child any inkling of his true quality and birth, unless desired by the earl himself?"

"So may Heaven help me in my need!" said the padre, solemnly. "I much fear, Claude, that the time is nigh when the knowledge of either would only prove the poor orphan's ruin."

"Alas! my lord, and I do grievously fear the same," said

Duval. "However that may be, and though I have lost the moneys which my lord sent to you for charitable purposes, I doubt not to return with such documents as shall convince you that I am in no way an impostor."

"I do not suspect thee, friend," said De Oliva, with a smile. "And, in fine, I accept your charge; so now you may join these revellers awhile, for I see you are a jovial companion."

Duval reverently thanked the general, and was going to leave the boy with his new protector, while he joined the merry company on the green. But Mervyn leaped upon his neck, and clung to him with loud screams. The padre arose, and tried for some moments to soothe him with promises and caresses; but the child was not to be pacified, and seemed rather terrified than allured by the Jesuit's foreign-sounding English, though couched in such soft phrase as "dear leetle boy!—*chiquito de mis entrañas!*"

"Well, take him with you—he will weary anon," said he, at last. "He has a character, at least; here are two traits—obstinacy and affection. When his little lids begin to droop, return with him to the college. We are not much used to the management of such nursery-scholars, but old Ambrose, a lay-brother, will readily take charge of him."

Claude withdrew, with a lightened heart, to join the revellers, among whom he soon established himself as a general favourite. Independently of his splendid livery, dashing manners, and devil-may-care style of conversation, he danced to admiration, gossiped with the old women, and talked soft nonsense with the young. His presence revived the festival, which was beginning to flag, and a moonlight of surpassing brilliancy had supplied the place of the sun. Jokes were cracked, healths drunk, songs sung, and merry games played, till old and young were all alive with gaiety. The favourite but now antiquated sport—the beloved revelry of the Norman peasantry, and of old England, too, before misery and manufactures had worn the life-blood out of our hearty and gallant commons—Kiss in the Ring, was proposed by Claude, and carried by acclamation of the young men, and faint "nays" from the tittering lasses. And a mirthful sight it was to see them all standing in a vast ring, maid and bachelor, blooming, and blushing, and giggling, like grown-up fairies, beneath the sweet moonlight and chequered shade of the venerable trees. The picturesque

peasant dress of the period; the parti-coloured petticoat, little roguish bodice, and gaudy caps of the women; the gay nether garments of the men, their long dangling garters, and crimson sack caps, made as pretty a grouping as the most expert ballet-master could contrive.

The good fathers of the convent (for so they were considered by the people of St. Omer, whatever the affrighted Puritans of England and the Jansenists of France might hold them) looked on with encouragement and even pleasure; men whose pens were foremost in the fierce controversies of the time, and whose persons were engaged in its most perilous intrigues, seemed to refresh their study-worn souls with this exhibition of natural and hearty feeling. At the same time, their presence produced a salutary effect, in restraining any tendency to intemperance or quarrel, to which, indeed, the phlegmatic people of Flanders were but little addicted.

De Oliva himself remarked with a smile that Duval obtained by far the greatest number of crowns, to the vexation of his compeers; but his perpetual good-nature and evident courage kept him clear of downright quarrels. The Jesuit observed also, but with deeper attention, the young boy who had been so singularly entrusted to his charge. To his surprise, Mervyn, young as he was, seemed bent on sharing all the jollities and pranks afoot, imitating Duval with a fidelity astonishing in one so green of years. He danced, ran about kissing the little peasant girls, sipped wine, and made the old men shake with laughter at the gallant style in which he sang a little English song. But at last the urchin fell asleep in the arms of an old woman, whom he persisted in calling "nurse Alice," and De Oliva ordered her to take the child into the college, and deliver it to the care of the lay-brother appointed to the office. The great bell of the convent soon after tolled, and the good meeting was broken up.

Claude found a straw pallet prepared for him near another for Mervyn in an apartment plainly but substantially furnished. Relieved of the heavy responsibility which had pressed upon him, he cheerfully commended himself to the Virgin, and was soon in a deep slumber.

In the morning, Mervyn was sent for to breakfast with the padre himself, while Claude was handed over to the care of the lay-brothers in the refectory. These personages appeared in some little commotion, and Claude learned that

the movement was caused by the return of Van Huysman, rector of the college, a man of great severity in discipline. He had been in England, superintending some affairs of the order; but as he travelled in the apostolic fashion, with scrip and sandals, the community were kept on the alert as to his return.

Claude was earnestly engaged with his bread and fruit, when a brother arrived to summon him to the general's presence. On entering the apartment, his eye was directed on the newly-arrived rector. His figure was remarkable for its great height, and the majestic shape of his shoulders and head, but he was lean and bony to the last degree. His face seemed macerated by constant fasting, but the expression was large, severe, and commanding, especially when his sunken eye lighted up, as it was wont when earnestly engaged. An habitual stoop, caused by weakness or constant study, somewhat detracted from his stature, but gave a kind of devout meekness to the natural austerity of his figure.

A glance around convinced Claude that something momentous had occurred. The padre looked pale, and his lip quivered with nervous agitation; the rector himself seemed troubled; only little Mervyn was quite at his ease, supping bread and milk. The padre's first words were ominous.

"It is unnecessary for you to hurry yourself, Duval, on your return to England," he said. "My friend, and your unfortunate lord, is no more; he committed suicide in the Tower on the night of the fire."

Claude stood for a moment thunderstruck, and then exclaiming, "Holy saints!—I dreaded this!—my lord is murdered!" sank sobbing into a chair.

"Heaven only knows," said the Jesuit, crossing himself. "But vengeance is His, and He will repay."

"But is this certain? or is it but a tale afloat among the mad rumours of the day?" exclaimed Claude.

"Young man, it is but too true," said Van Huysman, in his calm, measured tone. "A jury sat on the earl's body the evening after, but in such confusion and tremors, on account of the still-raging flames, that little was done. The jury, indeed, complained of the scantiness and perplexity of the evidence, but they hastily returned a verdict of *felo de se*. And so the earl, your master, was buried, as

I myself saw, in a rude grave, dug in the Tower ditch—uncoffined, with his cloak for a shroud."

Claude fairly wept at this dismal recital, and hiding his face in his hands, sobbed for several minutes like a child. Mervyn, unconscious of the share which he himself had in that grief, ran and threw his arms around Claude's neck, and cried for company. A few drops forced themselves to Oliva's eyes too, but the rector looked on with stoical composure—almost with contempt.

As Claude still persisted that the earl's prediction had come true—that he was murdered, and called a suicide—the Jesuits, though they said nothing to Duval, exchanged looks which spoke their conviction that the prophecy had a foregone conclusion. But when Claude minutely related his adventures with Blood—the interview in the Tower—and the fierce pursuit he kept up, as if anxious to destroy witnesses whose evidence was so dangerous—Oliva was once more staggered. Van Huysman, however, coldly remarked that the very circumstance of Blood's nocturnal chase proved an alibi, at least, in his favour. Still Claude persisted in his belief that this man had murdered his lord, most probably in the time which had elapsed between his rescue by Edwards, and meeting with him again in St. Paul's churchyard.

"We will examine what cohesion there may be in your account with the circumstance that appeared on the quest," said Van Huysman. "Here is a copy of the proceedings, extracted from the *London Gazetteer*. It is short and timid, but not without significance."

The Jesuit produced a paper printed on a small sheet, in very brown type, and handed it to Claude. The latter, after a glance at Mervyn, who was looking on in innocent wonder, and receiving a nod from Oliva, read the article aloud. It was headed: "Horrid Self-murder of a Popish Lord in the Tower, on the Night of the Outbursting of the Fire," and proceeded in the following style:—

"The monstrous consequences which flow from a devilish religion (or rather atheistical pantheism) were fully and most horridly shown in the dismal discovery which was made yesterday morning, about four o'clock, a.m., of a bloody self-murder, executed by the popish Earl d'Aumerle on his own person." Then followed a long tirade against the Pope and all the cardinals, who were designated as

Antichrist and his devils; against the council of Trent; an eulogium on Luther; and finally, by no very perceptible connection, a brief narrative of the earl's commitment to the Tower. The certainty of his guilt, in the matter of the Irish rebellion, was strongly dwelt on, and his melancholy and desperate expressions on that occasion were noted. Then it was ambiguously hinted that he was aware of the plot of the Jesuits to burn the city, and it was concluded that the audience which he solicited of his Majesty was for the purpose of revealing that dreadful mystery. But the fire breaking out before the King could be prevailed upon to see him, it was generously left to the consideration of the public, whether remorse, or disappointment at the partial failure of that most dismal plot, had suddenly driven the earl on to his suicide. The *Gazetteer* professed itself unable to determine, and proceeded to lay the evidence before its readers.

The principal evidence was that of Talbot Edwards, keeper of the regalia. He stated that he served the earl at his supper, and aided to undress him, about half-past ten. That he left him in bed, but as he went out of the antechamber, heard the earl get up and draw the inner bolt. That he himself very carefully locked and secured the three doors leading to the stone stairs of the Bloody Tower, and delivered the keys to the lieutenant. That, to oblige one of the warders, who was on watch at the foot of the stairs, and who was afraid of ghosts, he brought his supper there, and ate it with him. That they had a beef pasty and three hoops of strong ale; that afterwards, feeling sleepy, they agreed to watch turn about, but he did, on his troth, believe they were once both asleep at the same time. That, however, about a quarter before twelve at night, he was awakened by a loud report or bang, which seemed to him like the falling of a door, or of some portion of the building. That the warder and he were greatly frightened, and thought to go to the lieutenant and relate what they had heard, but that they were securely fastened in the tower, as was usual. That after listening for some time, and hearing no further disturbance, they went up the staircase and knocked at the outer door, calling on the earl. That while there they heard two deep and, as they thought, choked groans, followed by extreme silence; but on making a great uproar

at the door, and calling out, "My lord, doth aught ail ye?" a voice, which they took to be the earl's, answered, and said that he was well—only some timbers had fallen in the courtyard. That thereupon they retired, and spent the remainder of the night very wretchedly, thinking it was some spectral sound. That as soon as the watch was relieved, they went to Master Lieutenant and told him what they had heard, who thereupon was much troubled, and came hastily back with them. That they found all the doors firmly locked on the outside, as on the night before, and the earl's bed-room door still fastened on the inside. That having received no answer to repeated calls, Master Lieutenant directed them to break open the door; and that entering they found the earl dead in his bed, with a deep wound on his left side, and a pistol, with a spring dagger, lying on the floor. The only additional evidence was that of Sir John Robinson, who merely proved the finding of the body and the impossibility of any one having had access to the apartment. The only suspicious circumstance was, that a piece of torn paper, and, some reported, a lock of coarse hair, were found clutched in the dead man's hands.

To all this strong and apparently conclusive statement Claude had little to object. He saw that both the Jesuits were convinced that the earl had, in the agony of his feelings, and perhaps stumbling on the instrument at some opportune moment of desperation, committed suicide. He, too, was staggered by its coherency, but he protested that he would return to England, and dedicate the rest of his life to discovering and punishment of the murderers.

"It were matter of notable peril for you to attempt," replied Van Huysman. "This same *Gazetteer* contains an offer of three hundred guineas for your apprehension."

"For my apprehension?" exclaimed Claude.

"You are accused of robbery and *scandalum magnatum*," replied the Jesuit, sternly. "Of robbery, in having stolen your master's jewels of the garter, and certain sums of money; and of the still graver offence of giving out that a child, supposed to be your own, is the lawful heir of the titles and estates of the Earl d'Aumerle; and this suit is instituted on behalf of his late lordship's wife, now countess in her own right."

"I did tell your reverend lordship how I lost the jewels.

'Tis a foul conspiracy!" exclaimed Claude, vehemently; "and that this child is my lord's sole and lawful heir, I will maintain with my dagger, in the throat of whoso denies it, be he king or beggar!"

"I have some private reason to put faith in your story, Duval," said the padre, gently. "But we are destitute of all proof, of all evidence, either of his birth or of his father's acknowledgment; and this wicked woman, his mother, has every engine of oppression at command. At present, our sole endeavour must be to keep his existence a secret. If the earl's death occurred as you suppose, they who have imbrued their hands in his father's blood would fain wash away the stain in his. We must go to work cautiously; we have emissaries in England who will make such inquiries as are meet. Meanwhile, this child is under my protection, whatever happens."

Claude bowed, his heart was too full to speak.

"And now, brother," said the general, turning to Van Huysman, "you said you had something to relate of your own mishaps?"

"Rather my good fortunes, father," replied Van Huysman, "since I arrived in time to succour a Christian in distress."

CHAPTER X

THE TABLES TURNED

Claude's attention, which was somewhat excited by the observation concluding the last chapter, was fixed when he heard the Jesuit relate how, passing through the forest of Clairvaux, he had lighted on a man bound hand and foot, and severely ill-treated by robbers. He had freed him, and engaged some labourers to bring him to the college, where he expected him every moment. He added, with a smile, that his Samaritan propensities were quickened by a mishap which had befallen himself, for that he was robbed, and almost murdered, by some highwaymen in a wood, near Calais, the day before.

Claude was somewhat confused on hearing this tale, and on finding that the assertions of Captain Oates (for

he doubted little it was that worthy) were all taken for granted, it also occurred to him that, from circumstances, it would be extremely difficult to disprove any charge which his late opponent chose to make. He strove, however, to put on an appearance of carelessness as he asked the particulars of the encounter, hesitating in his own mind as to whether he should relate what he himself knew of the matter. But the equivocal light in which he was conscious his character now appeared, and his doubts as to the opinion which those reverend men might have on the propriety of robbing even a robber, restrained him. At all events he determined that he would avow nothing until the necessity became evident. Perhaps, after all, the person found might not be Oates, and to certify himself on this particular, he asked and gained permission to retire.

Claude, on leaving the college, having observed a blacksmith's forge near the gates of St. Omer through which the victim must enter, led his horse there, to have him shod. There was, as usual, a considerable throng of boors and townsfolk assembled in the black stithy, and Claude found that the conversation was concerning the recent robbery, and father Van Huysman's humanity. The forge was open on all sides, and Claude stood slightly apart, while the huge, brawny-armed Vulcan performed his task. He soon, however, found that he was, for some reason or other, an object of general dislike or distrust. The men whispered one another, and looked at him with inauspicious eyes. The centre of this general sensation was a stumpy little man, who seemed actively engaged in exchanging suspicions with his neighbours.

Claude bore this for some time, till finding that the matter did not mend, "Why, how now, my masters," he said, "what is this? You seem afraid of me, as if I had the plague in my doublet; what mean ye?"

No answer was returned to this question for some minutes; the men hustled up together, and even the smith dropped his hammer, to look up with expectation. All eyes were turned towards the old man, who looked embarrassed with the responsibility thus cast upon him.

"Monsieur," he said at last, with evident reluctance, "excuse us; but you are not, as I think, much known in these parts?'

"'Tis very true, and I care not an I were less," replied Claude. "But why do you make the remark?"

"Because—because," muttered the peasant, "I—I am the syndic of the town gates, and—and——"

There was another solemn silence.

"And what have I to do with the syndic of the town gates, except to wish it may be long ere the keys cease to grace your worship's belt?" said Claude.

"Have you a passport, Master Stranger?" said a burly-looking man, whose garb proclaimed him one of the syndic's porters.

"When I learn by what right you demand to know, I shall be more ready to inform you," said Claude.

"I, sir? I am the syndic!" replied the old man, bristling up with importance.

"I showed my letters to the padre when I entered the town yesterday, and I do not think it necessary to repeat the operation," said Claude, sharply.

"Say you so, say you so, my master?" replied the syndic. "Then, by St. Bertin! we shall find means to make you. My life against a button, gentlemen, this fellow is the very man, Claude Duval, as he calls himself."

"Troth, you are right enough: my mother gave me no reason to be ashamed of the name," said Duval.

An exclamation of surprise, and even fear, burst from the crowd. The smith ceased his work altogether, those who had swords laid hands on the hilts, and the rest seized such weapons as chance presented, as if against some ferocious animal. Claude was infinitely puzzled, but could not refrain from laughing at this sudden panic.

"Ay, laugh away, laugh away! you will grin in another guise when the axe is on your neck," exclaimed the syndic, suffering himself to be elbowed out of his prominent position. "Gentlemen, seize him, in the emperor's name and the good town's. He is a robber—he confesses to the name—and his outward presentments are exactly answerable. Seize him."

"Who dares is weary of the world!" exclaimed Claude, fiercely. "But what, in all the saints' names, has put this madness into your empty skulls?"

"Here comes one who will explain, good faith," said the syndic, pointing to a mass of moving objects advancing on the road.

Claude had no difficulty in making out what was meant, when he recognised, amidst a confused mob of peasants, a squat figure on a raw-boned horse, which he seemed to sit with difficulty, bending forward in a very ludicrous position. Claude perceived that this personage was relating some story, in a raised and much-excited tone, exhibiting to the rabble, by way of illustration, his wrists and ankles, which were marked in red rings. The broad tones and vile French in which this individual was addressing his conductors—for it seemed he could speak it when he chose—and the deception he was practising, moved Claude irresistibly to laughter, in spite of the danger in which he stood. Oates's eye was instantly attracted by the unexpected sound, and uttering a shrill cry, he crouched down to his horse's neck, screaming, " Good people, good people, seize him ! that is the murderous thief who maltreated me ! seize him ! " And as if overcome by terror, he slided off his raw-boned steed, to the ground, where he lay, kicking and screaming.

" Seize him, in the emperor's name," shouted the syndic, rushing out of pistol-shot. " *Au voleur ! au voleur !* "

Some of the boldest of the rabble, repeating this cry, as hunters halloo to the dogs, rushed on Duval. At first, the good Norman began protesting his innocence, and accusing Oates of his villany, but his voice was overpowered in the uproar. Finding there was no chance of fair play from the mob, Claude, resolving to force his way out of their clutches, drew his sword. This movement sent them rolling one over another in great confusion ; but they were rallied instantly by the ponderous porter, who struck Claude a stunning blow with his cudgel on the sword-arm. In a moment the mob rushed upon him like waves of the sea, and he was fairly overpowered and forced down.

Oates, observing the success of his allies, now rushed into the *melée*, and screaming, " My purse, my purse, villain ! " knelt on Claude's chest, and tore open his doublet. The next moment the purse waved triumphantly over Oates's head, and changing his cry into " My joals, my joals, monster ! " he continued his search ; but Claude was now roused to desperation, and exerting all his strength, he dashed Oates to the ground with terrible violence.

The mob thought their prisoner secure, and the suddenness of the onset dismayed them. Claude struck round with his

pistols, his sword being broken, and he quickly cleared a way to the spot where his horse was standing, with the tawny blacksmith beside it, staring dumb with amazement. To spring into the saddle and dash out on the road was the work of a moment, and, simultaneously, Claude perceived some mounted gendarmes galloping out of St. Omer, shouting, "*Au voleur!*" Flight was now his sole resource, for he had little doubt he should be cut down before he could make any explanation, and he set off at a rate which soon left pursuit far behind.

His panic, however, served instead of the gendarmerie, and Claude continued at the same speed until his horse, strong as it was, showed symptoms of exhaustion. Covered with foam and the sweat streaming from his flanks, the spur itself had lost the power of urging it, and Claude, finding that he was crossing a large tract of unenclosed country, and being satisfied that pursuit was over, allowed the animal to take its own pace. He had now leisure for thought, and his meditations were by no means pleasant.

He knew that he was on the direct road to Paris, and that in two hours he had left St. Omer nearly twenty miles behind him. The general belief which Oates's tale had obtained, and the seeming proofs which supported it, made it impossible to return. On the other hand, his disappearance would confirm all that had been alleged against him; besides, he had still in his possession, as he thought, the bank-bill which he was to have delivered. On rummaging his pockets, however, he found that it was gone, and very likely into Oates's hand when he rifled him.

Under these circumstances it seemed madness to return; and when Claude ruminated on how he had fulfilled his promise to the letter, that his lord was dead and his child's cause hopeless, he determined to continue his route to Paris, and thence write a full explanation of his conduct to the padre, and await his instructions. But to effect even this was not without difficulty, for he was aware that the whole country must soon be in a hue and cry, and that his torn dress and the exhausted condition of his horse must necessarily raise suspicion. He determined, therefore, to conceal himself till nightfall in a forest which stretched to his right.

From this resolution he was diverted by a new circumstance. As he approached the forest a wild boar rushed

out pursued by a full cry of huntsmen and hounds, whose horses and gear were in not much better plight than his own, and the thought struck him that he would ride to a village which he saw down in a ravine of the forest and represent himself as one of the hunters, worn and ragged with the day's sport. This idea no sooner occurred than he adopted it, and, walking beside his spent steed down a very steep road, he found himself, to his great joy, before an inn bearing the appropriate sign of the " Golden Cross of Mercy."

Meanwhile, Oates, though stretched bleeding and senseless on the floor of the smithy, remained master of the field. He was raised with the greatest tenderness, and, agreeably to former orders, carried to the Jesuits' college. The whole story was at first heard with incredulity by Oliva, but Van Huysman took the opposite side, less from any partiality to the personage whose life he had saved than from the natural severity of his temper and the ill opinion which he had of mankind in general. He took the care of Oates on himself, having studied medicine as a relaxation from theology, bled him, washed his many bruises with an embrocation, and ordered him to remain quiet, although he testified a great desire to speak, especially when he heard that Duval had escaped all pursuit, the gendarmes returning completely exhausted.

On removing the purse, which Oates continued to grasp convulsively, Van Huysman instantly recognised it as that which had been taken from him by robbers in the wood near Calais. Learning, however, that it had been torn from Claude, he concluded that Oates had mistaken it for his own—an opinion which that gentleman took no care to impugn, when he understood how the case stood.

Everything was against Claude. Although the men who had robbed him were in black masks, Van Huysman recollected that one of them resembled Claude in height and figure. Little Mervyn's childish innocence made it impossible to gather any confirmation from him, and even Oliva began to incline to the painful belief that Claude was indeed the assassin he was represented. This opinion threw a shadow of doubt on his whole story, which was deepened into conviction when his prolonged absence and silence left no other interpretation of his conduct.

Meanwhile, Oates recovered fast under the care of Van

Huysman, whose severe stoicism of temper and manners, nevertheless, made even his charity repulsive. Oates, who had neither principles nor talents, managed to conceal the want of both by the low cunning which was his characteristic. For some time he kept absolute silence on the circumstances which had occurred between him and Duval, under pretext of extreme weakness. He, however, listened to all accounts, questioned on such points as were not sufficiently clear, and at length, when the general judged him well enough to answer his inquiries, he was prepared with a tale so admirably well concocted that it was hardly possible to suspect its truth.

The hints which Oates had gathered concerning Mervyn furnished him with the groundwork. He alleged that he had met with Claude in the forest of Clairvaux, that they had dined and drunk together, and that the former, excited by wine, confessed that he had a plan afoot to deceive the fathers of St. Omer, and even gloried in it. This plan, according to Oates, was nothing less than to thrust a base child of his own upon the fathers, under pretext that it was the son of an English nobleman confined in the Tower —an audacious calumny, which seemed supported by many circumstances.

On the whole, the balance of evidence inclined strongly against Claude. Still the general withheld his decision until some tidings should come from the accused, and he still hoped that those tidings would contain his justification. But when no intelligence whatever arrived, and several days passed, the padre found his suspicions ripening into certainty. Still he was puzzled by the great resemblance between Mervyn and the late earl, his alleged father, whom he had known well in former times. Unluckily, it occurred to him to explain this resemblance in a manner which chimed in with the general taste. Although Lord Aumerle had never been a man of intrigue, the padre knew not what influence the dissolute manners of the restored court might have exercised upon him. He thought it possible that this child might be the fruit of some secret amour, of which Claude bore the public blame. In short, he knew not what to think with any certainty, and finding that Oates knew nothing of the name of the Lord Aumerle in connection with the affair, he ordered all matters pertaining to it to be kept a profound secret; and Van Huysman

being his only confidant, it was impossible for Oates, with all his cunning, to fathom the affair.

Doubtful as he was, or rather convinced that a deception had been played upon him, the general resolved to continue his protection to little Mervyn. The beauty, sweet temper, and talent of the child, and his very helplessness, moved the padre's benevolent spirit, and he determined, in case of the worst, to adopt the boy, and bring him up to the holy ministry which he himself exercised; and the first faint traits of character in his childish nature were such as to give great hopes to him who would undertake to bring those early blossoms to fruit. In the meantime Oates recovered thoroughly from the treatment he had received, and there remained no longer a pretext for his remaining in the college. He had given out that he was going to Paris, to solicit service in the Dutch war, but he delayed his departure under various pretexts, the chief of which was a pretended desire to become a Catholic, for he purposely owned his heretic education.

Van Huysman was pleased with this chance of making a convert; but, on inquiry, he found so much ignorance, presumption, and even infidelity, under the hypocritical gloss with which Oates covered his real character, that he frankly owned to Oliva he had rather such a man remained a heretic.

Oates's real object was, however, to worm out the core of the mystery which seemed to envelop young Mervyn. But in this he was baffled, for his utmost diligence could only ascertain the fact of a large reward being offered in England for Claude's capture, but by whom, or for what, he could by no means learn.

It became necessary, at length, to take his departure, for divers rumours came to Oates's ear which seemed to render that part of the country an uneasy residence for him. He feared, in particular, that some one might arrive from England who would recognise him, especially as the college was then a sort of head-quarters of the persecuted English Catholics. On the whole, though by no means tired of the hospitality of the good fathers, he judged it expedient to leave the scene. He was still lingering, however, in the hope of hearing something about Claude, to direct him in his future inquiries, when news arrived, but not precisely of the sort which the captain

desired. Claude wrote to the padre from Paris, where he stated himself to remain in great destitution; and, after giving a brief but energetic account of the circumstances which had forced his abrupt departure from St. Omer, and accusing Oates of the robbery, he concluded by stating that he had hired himself as a groom in the train of Rouvigny, the French Ambassador to England, who was about to proceed thither. When there he said he would make such inquiries as would set his own character in its true light, and ascertain the possibility of reinstating the young heir in his rights.

It was not difficult for Oates, by protestations and assertions, to throw an air of improbability on this narrative, more especially as the Jesuits ascertained, about this time, that the earl's bill had been presented and paid at Paris, by one who professed to be their agent. At the same time, he declared his resolution of proceeding instantly to Paris, to find out this vile calumniator, and bring him to justice. In fact, having now caught scent of his intended victim, he was ready enough to depart. The padre, however, engaged him, if he learned anything certain about Claude, to communicate with him before he took any proceedings against him, and lent him a sum of money to purchase a horse and accoutrements; and so he departed one fine morning for Paris, first bidding the Jesuits a most grateful farewell, and bathing Van Huysman's hand with tears, as he protested that his life and all he had should henceforth be held as his boon.

The weasel was now fairly on the track of the hare, and as that persevering hunter, however outrun in the start, never fails eventually to come up with its victim, so fared it with Claude and his pursuer. On arriving at Paris, the worthy captain found, to his great grief, that the ambassador and all his train had departed for England. He ascertained, nevertheless, that a person answering the description of Claude was in his suite; and, finding no better could be done, as he dared not venture his own valuable person in England, he wrote to one whom he thought very likely to interest himself in the matter—Colonel Blood.

The next news, accordingly, which the Jesuits heard of Claude Duval was, that he was arrested and accused of the robbery of his late lord. The charge of *scandalum magnatum* was dropped, on Claude's making oath that

the child in question was his own, and that it had perished on the night of the great fire, by the sinking of the boat as they passed under the burning bridge of London. Not satisfied even with this, the countess directed a letter to be read in court, from her late husband, shortly after the birth of this pretended Reginald, Lord Mervyn, certifying his decease.

The ambassador made a slight stir about the arrest of one of his servants, but he waived his privilege, on ascertaining the felonious nature of the charges against him. And thus poor Claude was apparently abandoned to the rage of his enemies, and Oliva heard, without surprise, that he was condemned to the galleys for life. Shortly after, however, he effected his escape, and was not again heard of until he emerged in that character which has rendered his name the representative of all that is gallant, polished, and daring in highway robbery.

CHAPTER XI

THE REAL POPISH PLOT

Our little hero was now fairly installed at Saint Omer. Oliva was indeed thoroughly persuaded that he had been deceived in all Claude's statements, who, he concluded, had taken advantage of an acquaintance with his master's secrets, to palm the child upon him. Still there was something so engaging in the beauty and vivacity of the little foundling, that the Jesuit's heart was touched with compassion, and he resolved to accept the charge which chance had confided to him.

The padre easily detected veins of fine and rare materials in Mervyn's mind, which he thought might be hewn into a magnificent pillar of the church. It was a stirring and a stormy period, demanding every resource of genius and courage, when the Catholic power, after ebbing for a hundred years before the furious winds of the Reformation, was slowly and majestically flowing back to the ancient landmarks.

Oliva determined on educating his *protégé* at St. Omer,

and afterwards taking him under his own protection as an adopted child, if his future conduct did not disappoint his expectations. There was, however, some danger of this catastrophe, for with all the sweetness and goodness of his disposition, there was a wildness and impatience of restraint in his character which threatened evil consequences. Van Huysman seemed to think that under the stern discipline of the college he could crush this rebellious buoyancy of nature. The padre took care not to contradict him, whatever he might think of the matter; and as he himself shortly after returned to Rome, Van Huysman had ample opportunities of putting his ideas in practice.

Before he left St. Omer, Oliva gave strict instructions that the circumstances attending Mervyn's arrival should be kept secret, above all from the youth himself. He wished him neither to obtain any inklings of Claude's romantic story of his birth, which might give him unfounded hopes and expectations; nor, on the other hand, to know the ignominy of what the padre concluded to be the truth, especially as Claude Duval's name had now become notorious in England for several daring robberies, and Oliva had little doubt that the scaffold would be his ultimate fate.

The man to whom Mervyn was thus confided was by no means suited to the task assigned him, which required rather a training than a pruning hand. Arnold Van Huysman was a Belgian of noble birth, a man whose natural inflexibility and severity of temper were hardened, not subdued, by the extreme ardour of his religious principles. He carried devotion to the same pitch of imaginative madness as the early ascetics of the African church, in whose hot blood religion became a passion and belief fanaticism. Convinced of the apostolic truth of the Church of which he was a minister, he was ready to endure or to inflict with equal constancy and unrelenting courage. Insensible to pleasure as to pain, patient, persevering, inflexible in his resolutions, religion was his only enthusiasm, the sole engine which seemed to have power to raise his passions. Severe misfortunes, the ingratitude of friends, the betrayal of those whom he had loved, had dried up all springs of natural affection in his heart and soured his temper, though an habitual self-command, and great knowledge of the world, kept its ebullitions under control.

Mervyn was soon initiated in the preliminaries of education, as a pupil of the college, which was then one of the most celebrated seminaries in Europe. Many of the noblest families of France, and nearly all the great Catholic families of England, had their sons educated at St. Omer, which yearly sent forth into the world the most eminent scholars and polished intellects of the age. Men of great learning, and of remarkable sobriety of manners, were its teachers and examples, devoting all their energies to the sublime task of educating a future age. The nearly perfect system of training which that great order matured in silence, and which, but for the sudden revolution that dashed it to pieces, might in time have realised the grand vision of Loyola, and restored to the Catholic Church her magnificent empire of mind, boundless as time and human existence, was established at St. Omer in all its noiseless but irresistible power. The manufactory of intellect went on from day to day, as if of some material stuff, which could be woven to the fancy of the artificer.

The system of the Jesuits nevertheless did not aspire to what so many others have failed in,—to destroy or to choke the natural current of genius or passions in their pupils,—but only to direct them into such channels as they thought expedient and useful to the ends which they had in view. An entire and unreserved obedience to the Church in all things, a passionate, and at the same time an argumentative belief in her infallibility, were rigidly taught, and, as it were, kneaded into the very thinking power itself. On all others but religious points the Jesuits admitted the supremacy of reason, and, without directly impugning the sway of authority, they allowed their pupils to canvass the dogmatic philosophy of the times, and subject it to the analysis of experiment. The decrees of Aristotle and of the schoolmen, though still called infallible in their academies, were no longer enforced with the weight of ecclesiastical authority. The abstract and natural sciences were studied with infinite zeal in their colleges. These sciences were indeed cultivated somewhat too exclusively, and seemed intended to reduce the mind of man to a laborious machine of thought, rather than to inspire it with a creative energy. The flowers of imagination were rooted up, as if they were weeds that impeded the harvest of solid thought. And here it was that the great rock of their

system presented itself; they committed the great fault of forgetting that man has a heart as well as a soul.

The discipline of the convent of St. Omer, though extremely severe, was enforced by Van Huysman with the additional sternness of his character. The commonest actions of existence were regulated by an invisible but iron law, from which no reluctance, no appeal, could obtain exemption. A republican equality and simplicity of diet, dress, and manners reigned; the only licenced conversation, except in recreation hours, was in Latin, and then always on subjects which called forth the controversial powers of the mind. Nothing frivolous, nothing even merely amusing, was ever permitted; their very sports had a reasonableness in them, which showed that men, and not boys, had planned them.

The garb of the students was exceedingly simple, and no distinction which rank or riches could make was allowed. It consisted of dark brown cloaks, cross-shaped caps, and cassocks of snowy linen, with such slight alterations as the seasons required.

Time passed on, and as year after year rolled away, Mervyn's character began to expand, in all its beauties and defects, to the watchful eyes of his preceptors. Van Huysman observed its development with close attention, for Oliva continued to exact a particular account of him. It is true, that the interest which the padre had at first taken in his little foundling was somewhat weakened by time and long absence; but he still continued to cherish a kindly recollection of him, mingled with much of that divine feeling which makes us love the thing we have benefited. But the accounts which the rector from time to time forwarded were not so favourable as the padre had hoped. Van Huysman had often occasion to complain of the boy's impatience under rule, his daring and invincible pride, which no punishment could subdue, and which generally made him the head and front of all acts of insubordination. These achievements of course brought punishment on his head, the extreme severity of which, however, seemed only to rouse an indomitable power of endurance, almost of defiance.

Van Huysman, nevertheless, had remarked, not without some doubt of the efficacy of his severe system, that after menaces and chastisements were exhausted in vain to melt

the boy's obstinacy, a few kind words would bring tears into his eyes, and a touch on the point of honour suddenly vanquished all his obstinacy. These were good traits, and the rector, with all his austerity, really loved young Mervyn better than any other of his numerous charge. Indeed, it was scarcely possible to avoid distinguishing one so beautiful, for he grew up as his childhood had promised, and withal so finely, though capriciously endowed, that his talents were at once a wonder and a perplexity to his tutors.

But Van Huysman's affection produced an effect which most observers would have supposed to spring from a contrary motive—it increased his watchfulness and severity towards the object of it, and rendered his slightest fault less venial than heavy misdemeanours in the other pupils. No wonder, then, that Mervyn, as yet unacquainted with the metaphysics of the heart, mistook his preceptor's feelings, and imagined himself an object of peculiar dislike to him. This again produced a reaction, for Mervyn, who was ever too easily led by those whom he loved, or who he thought loved him, was inflexible as adamant to the compulsion which he thought injustice.

With all his faults, however, his talents were undoubted, and Van Huysman had long dedicated him in silence to the magnificent cause for which he himself was ready to become a martyr—the restoration of the ancient integrity and dominion of the Roman Church. But this purpose was in some respects likely to be baffled by the natural disposition of Mervyn, which seemed, from its daring and activity, rather fitted to form a great soldier than a distinguished ecclesiastic. And yet the work for which Van Huysman imagined himself forming a labourer, required many of the virtues which, in less stormy times, were deemed rather the characteristics of the killers of men than of the savers of souls. Courage, patience to endure, and daring to inflict, subtlety of intellect, and profound acquaintance with the passions and politics of the time, were among the qualifications required by that bold order, whose colossal desire it was to bring back the whole northern world to the footstool of the Roman dominion.

It is true, also, that Mervyn was not without his fits of application to studies of a nature suitable to the purpose for which he was intended. He plunged, with the reckless enthusiasm of his character, into the deep ocean of learning,

to whose shore they conducted him; and if he neither dived deep, nor brought up pearls of value, the exercise served to strengthen the muscles and nerves of his intellect. It seemed to Van Huysman that, even in studying the writings of the fathers of the Church, it was rather for the historical and poetical material they yielded, than for their devotional and controversial stores, that he devoured them with such avidity. The animated picture which those ponderous tomes present, as it were unconsciously, of ancient manners, opinions, and deeds, the dramatic splendour of the narratives in which the glowing fancies of the African fathers have clothed the stirring events of the times in which they lived,—these caught his attention more than their controversial value. Van Huysman perceived that he had a poetical nature to deal with, an inert power which accident might awake, as the chords of the Æolian harp are mute till the chance breeze passes which wakes it into passionate music; and he had no wish to stifle, nor even divert this natural sensibility, but rather to direct its energies into the channel where it was intended they should flow; for he was too deeply versed in human science not to know that even the eloquence of religion is cold and powerless, unless kindled by those fine emotions and sparkling thoughts which only poetical enthusiasm can strike out of the flints of logic.

Mervyn was allowed the full range of the noble library which the Jesuits had accumulated in their college, and though it consisted, of course, of such works only as had passed the keen ordeal of their criticism, there was much to kindle strange thoughts and yearnings in so young a breast. The activity of his genius, deprived of its proper exercise, vented its wild profusion of power in inert speculation and dreamy reverie, which, however carefully concealed in his own heart, increased the discontent which preyed upon him inwardly. As time passed, strange ideas crept into his mind, he knew not how; indistinct longings to venture out on that brilliant, restless sea of love and glory which his imagination painted in the world; a vague yearning for power and freedom, which are, in general, the first wishes formed by the aspiring heart of youth, invaded his monkish solitude.

The Jesuits, who desired that their pupils should be well qualified to mingle in a world which they were to govern

only by the supremacy of intellect, had accumulated in their library the choicest works of human genius, even in branches which they considered frivolous. Poets and romancers were in this latter category, and though, in general, forbidden books, the rector was not unwilling to allow Mervyn's taste some exercise in this direction. Among all these, Ariosto soon became the young student's favourite, and many of his happiest hours were spent over those charmed lays. Ariosto is, in truth, the very poet of youth; he breathes nought but love, and triumph, and pleasure; his passions are in their full and beautiful energy, his flowers in their loveliest bloom: no scent of autumn haunts the deep verdure of his forests. All things are possible in his legends; the prejudices and harsh laws of Nature and of man yield alike to his magic, or are not supposed to exist. Even death, and despair, and sorrow are but shadowed angels, not the black fiends of northern imagination; his heroes and heroines die, but it is reclining on beds of violets, with the songs of nightingales sweetly warbling them to rest.

CHAPTER XII

THE WORLD AND GENIUS

As Mervyn's knowledge of the deeds and opinions of men increased, the idea of inquiring from whom he had derived his existence occurred to him, at first as a subject of curiosity, but finally it ripened into a deep and anxious desire. Circumstances contributed to fan this kindled wish. Republican as was the equality which the Jesuits enforced in their academies, and resolutely as they endeavoured to annihilate even the shadows of those distinctions of rank and birth which, in that age, were emblazoned in all the pomp and pride of heraldry, those distinctions were recollected and enforced among the pupils with more severity for the prohibition of the masters. Among youths who were principally sprung from the noblest blood of France and England, what but shame and contempt could be the portion of the almost nameless

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Mervyn ? Even among the poorer class of students, whom the fathers brought up for charity or policy, he found little sympathy. However vulgar and unhonoured their names might be, all had *two*—all could speak of families and relations. It is true that the fierceness with which he resented any attack, however oblique, on his obscure parentage, and the courage and success which marked his outbursts of passion, discouraged many from trying experiments on his feelings. But still schoolboys, as well as men, know how to pierce the soul with those fine wounds which, deeply as they enter, leave no marks to appeal to or to justify revenge.

It was, therefore, after long sufferings and bitter heart-burnings, proudly concealed from the gaze of all, that Mervyn at length resolved to venture on a step which nothing but desperation, as he then thought, could induce him to take. Often as he had endeavoured, by various means and from various persons, masters and servants, to acquire some notion of his early years, and how he came among those youths who had all little histories of a *Past* to relate, he obtained only chilling negatives or absolute commands never to mention the subject.

Mervyn was at length nearly goaded to madness by the reproaches and sarcasms of his companions, who, with the malice inspired by envy of his personal superiority, circulated among themselves a story, the absurdity of which only added zest to its falsehood. It was said that he was the illegitimate offspring of a robber, beheaded at St. Omer, in whose fate Van Huysman had taken great spiritual interest, and was said to have accepted the charge of his child from the dying malefactor.

One day, when the whole school was collected in the theatrum, for it was an examination-day, and not a sound was heard but the studious hum of the scholars, Mervyn stepped boldly forward, his cheeks flushed with excitement, his eyes sparkling, and his whole frame trembling with nervous sensibility. The whole hall watched his movements with surprise, and those who had been the most covertly guilty towards him, were not without terror when they saw him advance to the cathedra itself—the lofty chair in which Van Huysman sat, enforcing silence and awe with the mere dignity of his presence.

The rector himself seldom or never interfered in the direct business of tuition ; but his gaunt majestic figure,

the consciousness that his searching eye was upon all, the knowledge of his inflexible severity, kept more order and submission than could the rods of a hundred ushers. Towards this dread presence, alone, uncalled for, but seemingly undaunted, did Mervyn advance.

The rector himself raised his eyes from a book he was perusing, not without some surprise, and inquired with harsh brevity, "*Quid vis, fili?*"

"I want you to answer me three questions, most reverend," replied Mervyn, resolutely, and in French—a forbidden language during the academy hours.

"*Tu?*" replied the rector, letting his book down on his lap, and gazing with his stern eyes on the boy. There was an emphasis on this solitary syllable, which made all tremble but Mervyn.

"Will you answer them, father? for till you do, I swear by this holy cross, woven into my clothes and heart, I will never learn another lesson, though you kill me."

"Indeed? and what are thy questions, child?" said the rector, in a milder tone than any one expected.

"I want to know from whom I spring—have I a father? Why do I know a language which I never learned? And why," he continued, bursting into tears, "why do I dream sad things that make me weep, and yet seem to me when I wake like recollections of persons and places I have actually known and seen?"

For a moment Van Huysman was absolutely silent with astonishment at the daring of the boy, and the extraordinary questions which he asked. The next, and his severe mind clutched at the advantage to be made by answering—to humble the boy's proud heart, and force upon him the conviction of the utter dependence in which he stood to the power which had thus far been his refuge and support. He therefore replied with perfect calmness, even gentleness,

"Since you have asked me, son, I will answer you, and, according to our custom, with truth and simplicity, although it certainly pains me to inflict pain upon you. Briefly, then, you have a father, a poor serving-man—not beheaded at St. Omer, but who will doubtless undergo that, or a similar fate, some day, either in France or England, for he is a noted highwayman in both countries. His name will rest an eternal secret from you. With regard to

your second question, English is your native tongue, and, for purposes which I shall explain at a future time, I have carefully cultivated your knowledge of a language which God has given you for great purposes. As to your dreams, I must needs impute their wildness and gloom either to a temptation of Satan, or to the irregular course of reading in which, I am conscious, I have too much indulged you."

Even as he uttered these harsh truths, Van Huysman was touched with pity for the young recipient, who stood pale and quivering with contending passions before him. He hesitated as to whether he might not soften his assertions a little; but, observing the fiery mark of what seemed to him defiance on the boy's cheek, he was silent.

The first words of his reply caused a sort of fearful titter among the students, although one glance from his terrible eye utterly suppressed all indications, or even tendencies, to mirth. But the laugh was heard too distinctly by Mervyn, and haunted him through years and years of far different scenes and events.

The rector, however, seemed to wait patiently for some reply, and, when he heard none, though burning tears gushed profusely from his pupil's eyes, and he seemed choking with sobs, natural feelings almost conquered his acquired stoicism.

"My son," he said, with peculiar gentleness, "do not sorrow as one that hath no hope. You are not fatherless nor friendless; the Church, the common mother of all mankind, is peculiarly yours. She has accepted you as an orphan into her bosom, and regards you as one of the most precious deposits which Heaven could confide to her charge. Her vast inheritance is yours; your portion in Israel is as hers. I say it aloud, my son, before all these men of proud and ancient blood—obscurely born as you are, I do believe that Nature has created you to be their leader and master."

"Why then am I their jest and football?" burst from poor Mervyn's heart; and overcome by shame and agony, he fell insensible at the rector's feet.

Van Huysman lifted him, and administered restoratives which quickly renovated his exhausted faculties, and then directed him to retire to his cell. The rector immediately resumed his habitual stoicism of manner, and the exercises of the morning went on as usual to their conclusion.

On Van Huysman's seeking Mervyn in his cell, some hours afterwards, he found him stretched on his mattress, weeping, and evidently exhausted with sorrow. It was in this mood that the Jesuit hoped to find him, and he knew well what springs to set in movement with the proud spirit with which he had to deal. He sat down by his bed, and in a tone calmer, graver, and more affectionate than ever he had used before, began to expostulate with the youth. He reasoned profoundly, and with an earnestness which seemed as if he were not himself altogether free from the great mania of the English republicans, on the nothingness of birth, and indeed of all human distinctions; on the sublime pride of owing nothing to men's opinions, and yet of mastering them; of being the architect of his own fortunes; and he sketched a dim but magnificent outline of the grandeur to which the gifts he had received from Nature alone might raise him; terminating the vista by a splendid aërial view of the domes of the Vatican. He alluded, with more emotion than ever Mervyn had imagined he could feel, to the misfortunes of his own early youth, from which the greatness of his birth was so far from protecting him, that it had been the chief cause of his sufferings. He did not, indeed, mention how, but there were rumours afloat which Mervyn had heard, concerning some early love for a woman of inferior birth, and of a tragical sequel brought on by the pride and fury of his family.

All that could be suggested by the noble and austere philosophy of which he was a disciple, Van Huysman offered to Mervyn. But the maxims of stoicism were not made for youth, and its petrifying doctrine needs a deep mingling with the waters of sorrow, ere it can harden the feelings into that stony and passive repose which, according to Epictetus, is happiness. Mervyn, therefore, listened submissively, but without being persuaded.

The rector observed his little success, and quietly took another tack. He touched him on the score of his pride, and asked him if he meant to give his envious companions the satisfaction of observing what effect their poor sarcasms had upon him. Mervyn took fire at the suggestion, and dried his tears, declaring he would let them see he was their superior in everything but the mere chance of birth, and that he was fitted to win himself a prouder name

than any they had inherited. Van Huysman applauded this resolution, and having exacted a promise that he would show his contempt only by philosophical indifference, led him to the refectory, where the scholars were assembled at their noonday meal.

The dinner passed over with the usual silence and order, and at its conclusion the students were allowed to take their accustomed recreation in the grounds of the college.

Mervyn, who was wont to be foremost in the athletic sports of the playground, kept now at a distance, and wandered aloof, with his arms folded, lost, as it seemed, in bitter meditation. The other youths, released from the stern watch of their superiors, began to make jests on him, and to mock his melancholy manners. This roused the bitterness and defiance of his nature; he walked contemptuously through them, uttering not a word, but seeming to glare defiance on all. A general hiss was the consequence, and forgetting his promise to the rector, he turned round and challenged any or all to fight.

There was an immediate dead silence to this proposal. It happened, however, that some young men were playing at tennis, and one of them, son of a marshal of France, threw the ball, whether by accident or design, at Mervyn, who received a violent blow on his temple. To catch the ball and send it back with emphasis at the young noble's head was the work of an instant; blood instantly flowed from the wound, and the sufferer, foaming with rage and pain, raised a cry of "Down with the bastard!" The cry was instantly caught up, and repeated by the whole mob of schoolboys, and a general attack on Mervyn followed, in the midst of which a carriage, drawn by mules very superbly harnessed, and surrounded by lackeys in dark livery, arrived at the gates, from which an old man alighted, leaning on Van Huysman's arm.

So suddenly had the riot risen that the visitor's attention and that of Van Huysman were called to it at the same moment, and just as the hunted Mervyn stood hot and exhausted at the carriage door.

Van Huysman's waved hand hushed the whole hubbub instantly, and there was a deep pause of silence.

"This is singular discipline, brother," said the new-comer, sternly. "Is it thus that you allow your pupils to hunt

each other, like savage beasts? And what is this—can it be? Is this poor panting child my—I mean, is it Mervyn?"

As if in reply to the padre's question, all pointed to the bleeding skull of the marshal's son.

"What say you to this charge, Mervyn?" said the visitor, in tones of great kindness. "Be not afraid of me, child—I will be your friend, as I have ever been, if you give me not cause to the contrary. Do you not remember me?"

"I have never forgotten you," said the boy, passionately, and, snatching the padre's hand, he kissed it and burst into tears.

"Your protector, child," said Oliva, gently, for he it was. "And now tell me, why did you throw the ball at De Grammont's head?"

"He called me bastard," sobbed Mervyn.

"Is this true, M. de Grammont?" said the padre, turning to the young Frenchman.

"And so he is, my lord," replied he. "His reverence told us all he was so this morning, from the chair."

"How, brother?" exclaimed Oliva, turning sharply round.

"My lord, I will explain all," said the rector, meekly; "but it is not fit that my apology should be heard by these unreasoning boys."

"And bastard as you call me," exclaimed Mervyn, again yielding to the violence of his passions, "I tell you all, French nobles, to your teeth, that I were prouder to be the bastard, if I am such, of one whose fathers conquered at Crecy, than the lawfullest heir of the proudest noble that was conquered there."

Oliva smiled, though with some degree of reproof; and commanding all to retire to their cells, he entered the college, leaning on Van Huysman's arm.

The state of Mervyn's mind, which Van Huysman now described with minute sagacity, troubled the padre, and he determined to examine him more particularly himself. Mervyn was accordingly sent for, and entered with a modest and downcast visage. The padre was secretly touched with his humility and beauty, as he knelt to receive his blessing, and arose reverentially before him in his plain garb of a young acolyte.

"How is this, son?" he said, mildly: "your reverend

rector tells me you grow restless, pining, discontented; that you are not satisfied with yourself nor with your companions. What is the reason of this? What do you desire? Do not fear to tell me," continued he, after waiting a few moments for a reply; "I was young in other days myself. Tell me boldly, son, what would you have to make you content?"

"Glory, father," replied the boy, resolutely.

"Glory, my son?" replied Oliva, smiling. "And what glory? of heaven or of earth?"

"Of both," said Mervyn. "I am dishonoured by my birth; I would repair the injustice which fate and men's opinions have inflicted on me. I would win a name, father—a name! which the crime of my parents has denied me. I would not grow, wither, and die like a weed on a rock, which the ocean of time sweeps away for ever, none know whither, and none care."

"And this glory—have I not put you on the way to win it, son?" said Oliva, somewhat reproachfully.

"Father, forgive me; I dare confess to you—I dare!" said Mervyn, passionately. "No, I know that I can never win glory—never, never fulfil even my duties—as a minister of religion. The sword, the sword, my father! give me a sword! let me die as a champion of the Church in the field of battle! I ask no better fate; but I feel that I have not within me the qualities which make the priest—I have neither patience, nor meekness, nor power to persuade, nor am I passionless as the marble on which I lean. Be not angry, holy father, and let me die for you and the Church, but on some field of battle, not at the stake."

"Child, you mistake your vocation," said Oliva, with some degree of sadness in his tones. "Know you not that the same prejudices which declare your birth infamous will meet you on every hand, and keep your soaring genius for ever chained to the dust? Hope you to wash away the stain in your blood? or that the proud nobles of France will suffer a base-born plebeian to reap the harvest of glory which they have long regarded as their peculiar property? Know you not that the class from which you spring are the hewers of wood and drawers of water—the men whose sinews and blood plough and sow the soil which their masters reap?"

"Is there no refuge, then, father, from the scorn of mankind? Father, how have I deserved this punishment?" exclaimed Mervyn, vehemently.

"What is, is; we cannot alter it," replied Oliva. "The English republicans vainly attempted to break the injustice of ages: they have their king back again, and with him the whole mountain of tyranny which their levers raised for an instant only to let it fall with additional force. Judge yourself, Mervyn—what have you to expect from the justice of the French nobility? These boys, who persecute and hate you because your merit is superior to theirs, are your contemporaries,—will in time be the noblesse of France, to whom you look for the reward of toil and blood!"

"Then am I born a slave, and a slave shall I go to my grave!" exclaimed Mervyn, with a fresh gush of tears.

"Not so, my son; there is one refuge, one only," replied the padre, with solemnity. "The Church opens her arms visibly to receive you—the only true republic, where merit may hope to thrive against prejudice, and set her feet on the purple of kings. Deem you the tremendous empire of mind is not worth wielding? Think you it is nobler to sway the bodies of men than their souls? What say you? Hath not the sovereignty over men's thoughts a grandeur more attractive to our immortal nature than the mere control of the clay that shrines it? And let me tell thee, too, my son," he added, observing the effect which his words seemed to produce; "let me tell you that spiritual as our dominion is, or should be, it doth oft and necessarily involve temporal sway and power. Listen, child! Who, deem you, governs France? Not Louis, though he be the king! Who Spain? Not Carlos, no! But these are secrets too important to be trusted to you as yet. What say you, son—will you be one of us, and share the colossal design on which the eyes of Heaven and earth are alike fixed?"

"Oh, if I but thought I could attain such glory, without imperilling my salvation, through inability to perform the conditions," said Mervyn, his fine features mantling with enthusiasm, when the padre interrupted him.

"You can, you shall, my child!" he said, with a degree of vehemence very unusual in his subdued nature. "Heaven confided you to my care, like Moses to the

daughter of Pharaoh, a helpless infant; redeemed you from a land of heresy, for the great purpose to which I dedicate you. Yes, my son, your glory shall rival that of St. Augustine. He but converted a barbarous people to the fold of Christ; you shall perform a harder task: you shall bring them back to the fold when the wolf has scattered them."

Carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment and of his own character, Mervyn threw himself at the padre's feet, and, in broken accents, declared his willingness to accept the task confided to him, if he was not altogether unworthy of it.

Raising his eyes then to heaven, and laying his hands on the boy's head, Oliva solemnly blessed and dedicated him to the service of the Church, while Van Huysman echoed a deep Amen.

Mervyn was on the point of rising when the padre observed him start, and saw that his eye was caught by some object at the door, which seemed to disturb him, like the silent entrance of a spectre. Van Huysman, too, turned, and beheld a man whom he thought he recollected, though dimly and unpleasantly, as if associated with some disagreeable dream. The stranger seemed indulging in a sort of sardonic grin, probably at the scene he had interrupted, though it vanished the instant the elders turned, and became by some sudden transmutation a smile of hypocritical humility.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

"DISTURB not yourself, brother," said Oliva, after a moment's pause. "It is one of my attendants, an acolyte, whom at earnest entreaty I have been prevailed on to place with you here; but, Brother Titus, methinks you somewhat exceed your privilege, to dog my privacy here."

"My lord," replied the brother, with abject submissiveness of tone, "if you had not bid me wait upon you here, I were, as suits me, engaged in the holy penitence you have been pleased to impose on me." There was something in

the tones of the man's voice singularly displeasing to Mervyn.

"Truly, yes: I had forgotten I meant to introduce you to the reverend rector," said Oliva. "I will be candid with you, brother, and in your presence say all that I intend to say about you, that you may know on what terms you stand here. Some weeks ago," he continued, addressing Van Huysman, "I received a letter from our brother Whitebread, in London, which was brought by this acolyte. Among other matters, the contents of that letter did recommend the bearer to us, with words to this purpose: That his name is Titus Oates, son of an anabaptist preacher, discharged from the family of the Duke of Norfolk and the chaplaincy of a war-vessel, on accusation of preaching popish doctrines: that he had at one time exercised the martial trade, but growing weary of it and of the world, he desires to be reconciled to the Church, and to die in her bosom, if you are willing to indulge him with a trial, brother."

"What hath induced you, friend, to wish to be of our society?" said Van Huysman, musingly.

"Reverend father," replied Titus, "a deep conviction that it alone can recall the wanderers of Israel and work the extirpation of the Canaanite. But," continued the acolyte, "can you, reverend father, have forgotten that you once saved the life of one Captain Oates, left by robbers bound and bruised in the forest of Clairvaux?"

"And art thou he, friend?" said Van Huysman.

"I am all that is left of that sinful man," said Brother Titus, humbly; "and I will freely confess that in those days your blessed exhortations fell on mine ear like corn on a barren rock. But blessed is he who throws bread on all waters, for, after many days, he shall find it again."

"Ay, brother, but perchance musty and rotten," replied the rector, sternly. "But tell me, art thou cheerfully resolved to forsake the world and its vanities, and to become a new man?"

"Heaven be my witness, I am," said Titus, turning up his eyes till only the whites were visible.

"Your name, your country, your parentage we know," continued the rector, as if anxious to work out some objection. "But, prithee, what is your age? And are you subject to any bodily infirmity, or owe any man debt?"

"For the body, 'sblud! I'm as strong as a horse," said

Oates, coarsely. "For debts, I have paid all I owe to the last farthing I had to pay with; and for my age, I was forty-two last Michaelmas."

"Methinks, brother, at my entreaty, you might admit him to probation," interposed the padre.

"Nay, I would not be as one of those harsh and heretic builders who reject the stone because it is flawed," said the rector. "But this man—no matter. We admit you on a trial. Go hence to the cell of the examiner, Father Lascelles, who will write your name and statements in the books."

"Son Mervyn, guide the novice thither," said the padre. "We must have private speech with the reverend rector. Why do you hesitate, youth?"

"It likes me not, most reverend," replied Mervyn, frankly. "I do remember this brother's eyes. I have seen them in a dream."

"Tut, tut! you are a foolish phantasist," said Oliva, sharply. "Let us hear no more of these strange reveries. Go with him, I command you."

Mervyn obeyed his superior's order, but with a sullen ill-will which was very apparent. Brother Titus, however, seemed not to notice this, and followed him in silence till they were out of earshot in the corridor, when the former observed,

"I should remember thee, youth—ay, sooth, it was my chance to be an inmate of this convent when thy father abandoned thee here."

"My father! what was his name? They will not tell me—only that he was a thief!" exclaimed Mervyn, with sudden and vivid interest.

"Not a thief, but a robber, boy, which is much more honourable—something between your rogue and your soldier," said Oates. "But I, too, consider myself bound by the prohibition thou speakest of, and will not now tell thee his name on any consideration. Nevertheless, the time may come when I shall make thee wiser," continued Oates, taking the boy's unwilling hand. "Meanwhile, count me among those who love thee. Leave me, with this message to the father rector—that I know from whom thou springest, and that the first proofs I offer him of my obedience and Christian spirit are these—that I will never betray the secret." By this crafty means did Oates establish a sort of

influence over Mervyn's mind as the depository of a secret which he would have given almost life to fathom.

A few days after this ill-omened introduction, the general resumed his journey, but he pledged his word to Mervyn, that as soon as he had worthily fulfilled his novitiate, he should come to him at Rome, and profess. This assurance seemed to reanimate the drooping spirits of the boy, and he separated himself almost wholly from his insulting fellows, plunging with renewed ardour into the severe studies which were necessary to place him at their head.

But this fit of application, like all that is violent, was not lasting; the influence of his mercurial nature returned, and inaction began to grow a positive pain. It was in vain that he strove to stifle those thoughts which involuntarily rose in his heart. A restless voice seemed perpetually to incite him forth, to do—he knew not what; but there appeared to be a niche in destiny left vacant for him.

These vague aspirations might have at last died away, as has been so often the case, had they not found fuel. Oates had attached himself in a particular manner to the young novice. He laboured also by the subtlest flatteries to worm himself into the rector's good graces; but Van Huysman's cold penetration and knowledge of the world were not so easily deceived. He conceived a very evident dislike for his new inmate, and seemed to have privately resolved that the term of his probation should be that of his residence in the college.

It was otherwise with the unsophisticated novice. Brother Titus soon managed to overcome the aversion which he had at first found in Mervyn, and to twine himself insidiously into his confidence. Against all prohibition and rules, he lent him works which it was little less than treason to introduce into the college—novels of a profligate age, which seemed to have lost even that phantom of morality, decency. The curiosity of youth induced Mervyn to read these compositions with eagerness, and though his pure mind revolted at the vicious manners delineated, still there was something but too fascinating in the excitement and glow into which they cast the imagination. Oates's influence was also increased by his talent in describing the world he had left, having acted many parts himself in its stormy drama.

These narratives, coloured by the vivid fancy of youth,

roused the lulled restlessness of Mervyn's nature. He longed to join that brilliant march of men and events, and soon began to regard the monastic walls which enclosed him as a prison, barring out pleasure and glory.

As Oates's project began to ripen, he increased his artifices to entangle the innocent boy, whom he had apparently taken into training. He inflamed his discontent by insinuations, which were eagerly caught at by Mervyn. He dropped hints that he doubted the story of his base parentage, and, as all particulars concerning it were carefully concealed, there was abundant scope for the romantic conjectures which he threw out from time to time. He stirred the fanciful mind of the boy with vague hints that he was sprung from a noble source, and that the story which gave him a robber for his father was invented to cover some iniquitous secret; and he gradually proceeded to instil a notion that the Jesuits were in some black conspiracy with those who had cheated him of his inheritance, and to represent that England was the only place where he was likely to obtain any information on this interesting point.

Oates seemed as well acquainted with the political condition of England at the period, as if he had made it a peculiar study, and he knew how to dress out his information in an attractive garb. Mervyn was both amused and excited by the description which he gave, though without any formed purpose or notion why he took such pleasure in them.

"And do you see, brother," said Oates one day, as they walked alone in the gardens of the convent, "do you see—a stirring world will there be soon in England. The Jesuits have concealed everything from you, though they mean to use you as a blind instrument. They have a vast plot whereby they mean to bring back arbitrary government and popery—I mean our holy Catholic faith. They have gained the King secretly, and the Duke of York is a notorious papist. The ministers are a base and blood-thirsty set, who will do anything to preserve favour, and keep their enemies on the cold benches. But there are many in England who would rather see all in confusion again than lose their precious religion and liberties. Yea, the old leaven of Cromwell is still fermenting in the masses, and what an angel from heaven, what a second Salvator Mundi would he be who could, and would, expose this wicked plot—I mean that

Jesuitical plot—which is afoot. Neither would he lack powerful friends and men of great quality to back him. There's all my Lord Shaftesbury's party, and the fine old republicans, who hold their lives as cheap in the balance of England's good ; not to mention that fierce and turbulent commonalty of London, which wants but a leader to show itself mighty as under the Roundhead parliament. But it were a bold man should lead them ! He must not pause or pant, or, like ill-trained bloodhounds, they would devour their own master."

" But our fathers—if, indeed, they have any such plan—are too politic men to be easily baffled," said Mervyn.

" Ay, there it is ! " replied Oates. " But I do think, if a man could by any chance get to see the correspondence which the rector carries on perpetually with England, it would need small explanation to understand how things are going."

" Perhaps not," said Mervyn ; " but doubtless, brother, these things are concealed, for good reasons."

" And yet I marvel that you, who are constantly closeted with Van Huysman—who must so often be left alone with these precious documents—have never had the curiosity to examine into the secrets they contain," said Oates, carelessly.

" Now, Heaven forbid I should chime into the tune of my birth by such meanness ! " replied Mervyn, colouring. " And if this great plan be indeed formed, it becomes both you and me, as true servants of the Church, to forward it with our life's blood, and perform in silence whatever is enjoined by her infallible authority."

" No doubt, no doubt," replied Oates, with one of his ugly smiles. " But how know you, brother, but that those letters may contain some inklings of your true birth and stolen inheritance ?—those especially which pass between Van Huysman and the general ? Bah ! if I were you, and had such occasion given me, I would look over those documents, with proper prudence—and then, if you report their contents to me, I may be able to dive deeper into these mysteries than your innocence permits you."

" I had rather die as I have lived—a beggar, dependent for existence—than be guilty of such betrayal," replied Mervyn, indignantly.

Oates laughed it off, as he generally did when he found

himself baffled, and quietly turned the conversation into some other channel. But he had laid the first stones of the foundation on which he hoped to erect his future superstructure of cunning and guilt, and he determined not to forego his plans at the first unfavourable symptom in the soil on which his proposed building was to rest.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TEMPTER

Although this proposal of Oates shook Mervyn's growing good opinion of him, he soon recovered his ground with one so ignorant of the world, and of its wickedness and artifice.

Meanwhile, Van Huysman viewed this intimacy, and indeed all his new guest's movements, with suspicion. Certain facts, which could not elude his keen observation, very soon induced him to order Mervyn to cease associating with Brother Titus, and to convey information to the latter, that he must hold himself in readiness to quit the college as soon as a reply could arrive to his demand to that effect from Rome.

This prohibition appeared to Mervyn, and was represented by Oates, as an act of intolerable tyranny; and the youth's compassion was excited by observing the state of excommunication in which his friend was shortly placed. He was not allowed to converse with any of the scholars; he dined at a solitary table in the hall, and was treated in all respects as one out of the pale.

Oates appeared to bear this with great patience, secretly harvesting his revenge. But Mervyn's heart was touched with the seeming injustice, and he took private opportunities of assuring Brother Titus of his continued sympathy and regard. But even these stolen interviews became suspected, and Van Huysman strictly commanded him not to speak to Oates, whom he now openly designated as a crafty spy.

Matters were in this state when Van Huysman was summoned to Paris, to attend a meeting of the order, which was to discuss certain important measures. The rector exacted a promise from Mervyn that he would not speak to Oates

during his absence ; informing him, at the same time, that on his return that worthy would be expelled for certain offences which he had committed against the rules of the order. The better to secure his pledge, Van Huysman ordered his pupil to keep in his private cabinet, except at meal-times, and to employ himself there in translating a homily of St. Chrysostom, which he knew would occupy him until his return.

Unhappily Oates had already lent Mervyn a book, which, from its being at once so celebrated, and so strictly forbidden in the college that it stood in the library chained and padlocked to the shelves, had always been an object of great curiosity to him—the novels of Boccaccio. The exquisite style of this work, the fascination of its inflammatory descriptions, the brilliant satire, even the boldness with which the licentious Italian assailed all that he had been accustomed to revere, took a forcible hold of the youth's imagination. Although, in the severe and intellectual order to which he belonged, Mervyn had never observed any of the scandals which form the staple of Boccaccio's satires on the monks of his time, still it seemed strange to him that in the period of her greatest grandeur and prosperity, such rottenness should be at the very heart of the Church. This shook the foundation of all his beliefs, which was precisely the effect, coupled with the awakening influence of the passionate poetry of Boccaccio's legends on the dormant emotions of his youthful nature, that Oates had calculated on producing. Mervyn's romantic temperament was flattered at every turn by some sweet melody of hope and love. The hideous prejudices of the world, which had long glared at him like the heads of the hydra, seemed utterly annihilated. Love conquered and subdued everything ; the obstacles of birth and fortune vanished at the mere touch of his roseate fingers. All the cares and vicissitudes of life, the stormiest turns of fate, were but matters for a midsummer reverie, or an enchanting and musical tale told to the murmur of waterfalls, and dim voluptuous strains that came and went like the breezes that brought them, no man knew whence nor whither.

With this sealed book in his possession, still Mervyn was obliged to use the greatest caution in reading it, and his apprehensions of discovery perhaps increased his relish. The present opportunity seemed to him irresistible, and he

abandoned himself to the delicious perusal. Depending a great deal on the facility with which he usually performed his tasks, Mervyn continued to read and read, until information that the rector was expected much sooner than he had calculated fell like a thunderbolt in the midst of his enjoyments. He was obliged immediately to apply himself with great vigour to the homily of St. Chrysostom, which he found much longer than he expected ; and to finish his task he found it necessary to continue it after the college hours, but as no lamps were allowed this was sufficiently difficult. Unluckily he recollected that Oates had a little taper and flint, which he often used himself, and he slipped a piece of paper into his hand requesting him to lend them. Oates complied instantly, and with a look so expressive, that though much puzzled by it, Mervyn saw that his friend understood much more in his words than their simple meaning.

Dreading the severity of his preceptor, who he now learned was expected home early in the morning, Mervyn applied himself to his task with nervous trepidation and haste, and certainly took little heed of the niceties of the great father's Greek. It was growing late, and his toils were far from finished ; the moon, which was very bright, shone in upon him and his papers as he sat pale and exhausted, half quenching the rays of his taper. The college was profoundly quiet, the whole society having retired to rest, and no sound was audible but the sighing and waving of the trees in an orchard immediately adjoining. Mervyn felt a deep shadow of melancholy stealing over him, and once or twice tears gushed to his eyes, and fell on the paper which he was elaborately covering. The silence and repose of the night gave his fevered spirits pause for reflection, and he began to repent that he had ever listened to Oates's advice, and forfeited the sweet peace of conscience which he had once enjoyed. The strictness of his education caused him to imagine that the faults he had committed were of the blackest dye, inasmuch as he had broken a solemn command of the Church. A sensation of superstitious fear crept over him, and he almost imagined he beheld the Evil One himself at the moment when, raising his eyes suddenly, he encountered the sinister gaze of Oates fixed upon him.

"Sancta Maria! how art thou here?" he exclaimed, for it was no longer possible to keep his pledge to the Jesuit.

"Hush! make no noise. Have you discovered anything?" said Oates, eagerly.

"Discovered anything! In Heaven's name, what do you mean?"

"Among the papers! among the papers!" exclaimed Oates, clutching up his manuscript; "anything, I mean, about your birth, or—the ploats of these Jesuits?"

"These papers, Mr. Oates, are but a translation from St. Chrysostom," replied Mervyn, angrily. "I know not what you mean, but I advise you to return to your own apartment instantly."

"Bah, bah! a homily?" said Oates, in a disappointed tone. "You are a calf, to make no better use of such golden opportunities. Tut! is yon the casket where he keeps these choice letters of his? Who knows? it may contain some marvellous particulars of your birth. You may be a king's son for aught I know."

"It is locked, and if it were not, I would defend it with my life," replied Mervyn.

"Bah! bah! you rave, my young sprig," said Oates, turning sharply. "You *dare* not, boy! You are in my power."

As he said this, he advanced towards an escritoire of massive oak, highly carved and polished, which he looked at for some minutes with great curiosity, at the same time feeling it round the lid.

"He hath them well secured; the contents must needs be valuable," he said, with much unction. "We will examine them, Mervyn, but he shall not suspect either of us. He shall think he forgot to lock this casket of his."

And Brother Titus suddenly produced a bunch of skeleton keys, with one of which he twisted the lock open, and threw back the lid. The vista of letters, carefully packed and endorsed, seemed to kindle his eyes as gold might a miser's.

"Come hither, Mervyn dear, come hither," he exclaimed. "Doubtless, the great secret of your birth is here. Quick, dispatch! Open some, while I examine these."

"On your peril, touch not one, Oates!" said the boy, springing forward and seizing his arm.

"What, boy, would you have me murder you?" said Brother Titus, his countenance flaming up like a demon's. "I should be loth to hurt you, child, because I have uses

for you ; but I have cut a tougher throat than yours ere now."

"You dare not, Oates, you are not such a monstrous ruffian!" said Mervyn, vehemently. "But you shall not read those papers, though I die to hinder you."

"Pooh, pooh, fool! why would you stand in your own light?" continued Brother Titus, more mildly. "Go on with your homily if your sickly conscience will not let you aid in the work, and leave me to manage this stuff. Ha! what's this? Letters from Master Coleman, the duke's secretary."

"Leave the papers alone, Oates, or, whatever be the consequence, I will summon assistance," said Mervyn, resolutely tearing the letter from his friend's hand.

"Why, then, I must do a desperate thing," exclaimed Oates, groping his hand in his doublet pocket.

"What will you do, Oates?" said Mervyn, turning pale and his heart beating thickly, for he thought he saw the gleam of a knife in Oates's pocket.

"Do! do nothing. But I must have these papers," said Oates, in an altered tone, and withdrawing his hand from the weapon. "I love thee, boy, and would make thy fortune ; and there is that in these papers will do it for us both. Read here, child, read here—from the duke's secretary, I tell you. 'Tis a pious robbery ; we shall pluck out the heart of this popish and royal conspiracy."

"Once more, and for the last time, begone and leave these papers unread, or I call for help," exclaimed Mervyn, with a fierceness and energy on which Oates had evidently not calculated.

"Unhand me, imp," he said, shaking his grasp loose ; "and utter but one word more, much less call out, and I'll ——Hush! what is that?"

"Some one is coming," said Mervyn ; "I hear steps. Do, dear Oates, begone. If they discover us——"

"They are in the corridor ; we cannot escape," replied the brother, staring aghast at Mervyn. "Put these away—put out the candle. Stay! I'll hide this in my pocket. Now for the desk. What a cursed chance!"

Steps were now heard coming up the corridor, and a voice which brought the thick dew to Mervyn's brow. They looked at each other with an expression of guilty alarm, which Mervyn shared, though he scarce knew why, and then

both began hurriedly thrusting the papers back again. But, unhappily, in the confusion of haste, Mervyn stumbled over a footstool, and fell with considerable noise on the ground. The door was instantly opened, a voice demanded, "Who is here at this time of night?" and the stately figure and severe countenance of Van Huysman appeared, lighted by two monks who carried torches.

Oates's first idea was to make a rush, but the cowardice of his nature banished the idea as soon as formed, and he stood livid and trembling beside the violated escritoire.

"Ha! what is this? My desk forced—my papers scattered about! Oates, Mervyn—alone—at midnight!" exclaimed Van Huysman, turning pale, too. "How is this, brother? Tell me instantly."

"We—we—found the desk open, and out of curiosity—out of curiosity merely," said Oates, stammering.

"Mervyn, my son! can this be true? is this possible?" said Van Huysman, in a voice husky with emotion. "A taper too—with this vile man—my most precious papers thrown about! Wretched boy, you have, indeed, proved yourself to be the true son of a robber!"

"I—I——" began Mervyn; but, overcome by shame and despair, he sobbed convulsively, and uttered not an intelligible word.

"How did you procure this taper, boy? and what book is this?—Boccaccio!"

"As for the taper, he had it from me, and for this purpose!" said Oates, boldly. "He, as well as I, suspect that he is of noble birth, kept here for some villanous intent, and we intended to examine these papers to learn the truth, when your abrupt entrance disturbed us."

"Is this true, Mervyn?" said Van Huysman, in a tone of sorrow and anger so mingled, that it was impossible to tell which preponderated.

"It is a lie, a monstrous lie, and you know it, Oates," exclaimed the boy.

"What, brother, did I not lend you a taper, and did we not agree to search this cabinet together? Why, there are the skeleton keys, which you told me you borrowed of the blacksmith of St. Omer—there, in the folds of your mantle."

Which was the case, for he had dexterously slipped the keys into the boy's dress directly he heard the footsteps approach.

"It is true, indeed, unhappy boy! but he who rears a tiger must expect to be torn to pieces," said Van Huysman, shaking the keys out of Mervyn's mantle. "Retire, both of you, to your cells, and to-morrow I will hold a chapter, to determine on what punishment is fit for the destroyer and misleader of youth, and the criminal folly of youth itself. Brothers, see that every outlet be well secured, and convey these conspirators to their apartments.

"Father, do you—do you condemn me unheard?" exclaimed Mervyn, in an agony of grief.

"You are heard, sir—look around!" returned the Jesuit, seating himself and clasping his hands. Then raising his eyes to heaven, he exclaimed, "Be Thy will done! the last hold I had on earthly affections is torn from me!"

Mervyn was taken to his cell by one of the monks, with a heart swollen almost to bursting, but too proud to make any further attempt at justification. Oates was also taken to his dormitory, not without a smile of malicious triumph at his young victim. Van Huysman then proceeded to gather up his papers, and to ascertain if any were missing, debating in his own mind the possibilities of Mervyn's innocence, and what punishment it would be necessary to inflict. Unfortunately, he was so deeply involved in this latter train of thoughts that he did not miss, until it was too late, a packet which Oates had secured, which was of the most important nature..

Mervyn was, meanwhile, abandoned to his reflections in the silence and solitude of his cell, where the monk left him, after a brief but sharp lecture, to which he replied not a word. He then threw himself on his pallet, where he lay in a state of moody desperation for nearly two hours. All the desolation and helplessness of his condition rushed upon him—his orphan childhood, deserted by all who should have loved and cherished him; his hopeless dependence; the irresistible force of the appearances against him; the shame which awaited him before those proud nobles, who would rejoice in the humiliation of the *roturier*;—all these thoughts combined nearly drove him frantic, and still the calm and lovely moonlight, as if mocking his misery, flowed through the narrow casement of his cell, filling it with shadowy light. The extremes of joy and sorrow alike make men indifferent to death, for, in such moments, it seems as if all the objects of existence were filled and cloyed, and that to live longer

were only to occupy a dreary vacancy in thought and feeling. Mervyn was almost astonished at his own hardness when he found he could not weep, but sat with dry eyes gazing around, and all but wishing he had some means of self-destruction, by which to escape the unutterable ignominy which, he thought, awaited him.

This gloomy reverie was disturbed by the sudden creaking of his door, and turning, not without a hope that it might be Van Huysman, he beheld the short, clumsy figure of Oates, wrapped in a dark cassock, and, seemingly, tightly strapped up, with divers little packages, as if for a journey. He entered with a stealthy step, putting his finger to his lips, and carrying his shoes in his hand, as if to move more noiselessly. Mervyn would have spoken, and probably, in no very complimentary tone, but Oates whispered, "For your own sake, speak not!" and closed the door carefully after him.

"What do you want with me, villain! have you your knife?" said Mervyn, recklessly. "Murder me if you like —I do not care—you have already slain my noblest part, my honour!"

"I come to save you, foolish boy," said Oates, quickly. "What is honour? The skin of an onion—peel off one, and there's another below. To be sure you have no longer an honour in St. Omer, but there's one spick and span new for you in England, whither I am going. Will you accompany me? Choose!"

"But how? It is impossible," said Mervyn, eagerly.

"By no means, not at all, when a man flies from such a bad possibility, or rather certainty," said Oates. "For ensample, it is certain that to-morrow you and I are to be publicly examined, condemned, shamed before these sanctified hypocrites, and these young sneering gentry, who will hiss us to death with scorn. Flight is our only resource; flight, and to England. There the mystery of your birth may be solved, or you may acquire such renown as will hide it in a blaze of glory. I have friends in England who will protect you for my sake: dare you accompany me?"

"I have no money, no friends, no hope in the world," exclaimed Mervyn.

"I have all, and you shall share them," said Oates, clinking a well-stocked purse in Mervyn's ear. "I tell you it in secrecy, and because I know you cannot betray me—the

Lord Shaftesbury is my protector, my patron, and shall be yours."

"But how can we escape?" said Mervyn.

"Leave that to me; do but follow; every moment is precious," replied Titus.

"But these garbs will betray us wherever we are seen; we shall be brought back with shame."

"No, no, I tell you! we will give out that we are novices exercising our month's humility by begging ere we profess," replied Oates, very eagerly. "In short, either follow me, or stay behind to suffer all the shame and dishonour which can be heaped on human head by priestly malice."

"Oh!" said Mervyn, "I know not whether to fly or stay be the worst part to take."

"Flight at least escapes shame, public shame! Will you stay to be the butt of these sarcasmous young nobles, to whom justice and mercy are equally strangers?" replied Oates.

This suggestion gave Mervyn the strength of heart and energy of purpose which he lacked. When the mind is in such a state of doubt, swayed to and fro by a thousand different and opposing motives and feelings, a single bold word or assertion is often sufficient to fix the balance, at least so long as to produce a degree of action which forces on its own conclusion. Besides, he was too much hurried, confused, and tossed in mind by fears, and conjectures full of terror, to reason calmly on the dangerous step he was about to take. He assented, therefore, hastily; seized the few articles which Oates suggested, and also the cross which the padre had given him, and in a few moments he was following that worthy on tiptoe down the dark corridor.

Oates led the way breathlessly back to his own cell, and motioning Mervyn to follow his example, got on a stool, opened the lattice, and pushed himself with slight difficulty out, dropping some few feet into the garden below. Mervyn then, at his desire, threw a bundle after him, and easily followed.

They were now in the garden of the convent, which was richly cultivated, and seemed balmy and beautiful as a mimic Eden under the serene light of the moon. Mervyn looked sadly round, and the sweet dewy scent of the flowers seemed like the voices of familiar friends, imploring him not to desert them for ever. He looked up at the little

oriel window of Van Huysman's closet, which was high in the dark pile of building, and perceived a light still burning in it, by which he knew that the father had not gone to rest. Compunctious visitings of remorse strained hard at his heart, and recollections of what a blow his conduct would inflict on him and on the venerable Oliva almost unnerved his resolution. But it was too late to repent. Oates commanded him to hasten, in a tone of harsh control such as he had never yet ventured to use, and dragged rather than led him through a little orchard which conducted to the walls enclosing the convent grounds. These walls, though of considerable height, were densely clothed in ivy, so that they easily clambered to the top, dropped deftly down, and immediately set forward at a very rapid rate on the road to Calais.

CHAPTER XV

WHIGS IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

It is not necessary to follow our fugitives step by step to England. They found few obstacles, and none which Oates's cunning or cash did not obviate. They procured a passage in a Dutch trader, and landed on a bright summer's morning at Wapping, a district purposely chosen by Oates as the most suitable to his objects.

As it was by no means safe to appear among the puritan population of London in a Jesuit garb, Oates changed it immediately an opportunity offered after landing. He then ordered Mervyn to follow, in the tone of a master addressing his servant, or rather slave, and set off to a quarter on the river-side inhabited principally by Jews and old salesmen. Indeed, during the whole voyage, Mervyn had remarked a wonderful change come over his companion's manners, not gradually, but from the very first moment in which he had trusted himself so foolishly to his protection. All his hypocritical softness, his flatterings and cajolings, had changed into a harsh imperious insolence, which every moment revolted Mervyn's proud spirit. But bitterly as he began to repent the step he had

taken, the youth felt that it was too late to retract, and that moneyless and friendless as he was, he had no resource but to submit, at least until he saw some feasible means of extrication.

Oates probably guessed that some such ideas were passing in his mind, for he looked round at times with a watchful eye, and as they plunged deeper into the dark mazes of the shore, he seemed to relax his new-blown dignity. At last he called Mervyn to him, and affably leaning on his shoulder, asked him how he liked London, and whether it seemed to him so gorgeous a city as he had imagined. Mervyn frankly allowed that nothing satisfied his expectations except the river, crowded with its forests of masts, and seeming to unload the treasures of the whole earth on its wharfs.

"You will live to see a more splendid portion of the city of London," said Oates, with a grin. "This city is the Sodom of the west, which God's great judgments of plague and fire have in vain striven to cleanse. And even as the shores of this great city are foul and unseemly to look at, so are the beginnings of thy fortunes, which are now on the anvil of destiny; for being freed from these accursed paupistical trammels, you have only to bear a witness before men in His cause, to obtain all earthly and heavenly rewards."

"Pray you, Brother Titus, what mean you?" said Mervyn, puzzled with this new and ponderous style.

"Never dare to call me by that idolatrous title again, boy!" said Oates, fiercely. "I am Dr. Titus Oates, a humble professor of the Christian evangele of the Church of England." But observing that Mervyn looked at him with a remarkable expression, he added more mildly, "Nathless, take courage, boy; fight the good fight, and your crown shall be everlasting light. I do intend, and that presently, to lead you before the great and generous lord whereof I spoke."

Mervyn made no reply, but these words broke a confused light into his mind, and he began to imagine that Brother Titus was but a wolf in sheep's clothing, and that he had been lured from the flock for no very advantageous purposes, which, however, he could not yet clearly divine. Absorbed in very unpleasant reverie, he followed Oates in all his meanders through the dingy alleys surrounding the

Tower, until they arrived at a broker's, with whom Oates seemed well acquainted. Here they purchased some very decent secondhand apparel, which Oates cheapened to almost half the price demanded. He purchased for himself a costume which Mervyn at first did not understand, but which he afterwards knew was that of a doctor of divinity. It consisted of a black gown, a plain collar, waistband, and cap with ears, all cut in the most formal and stiff style possible. Mervyn had a suit of very sombre colours, fit for an apprentice in a puritanical family of the period, when not only the broad distinctions between citizen and courtier were exhibited in the style of dress, but almost every shade of religious opinion was so indicated.

Thus handsomely fitted out, Oates no longer avoided the great thoroughfares, but took his way through the heart of the bustling city. Mervyn was delighted and dazzled by the splendour and riches which burst for the first time on his monastic eyes, and gazed in silent bewilderment at the glittering wares, the curious signs over the shops and booths, the dark-clad burghers moving with solemn pride through their wealthy marts, and richly-bedizened courtiers ruffling it haughtily past. The very serving-men in their flaunting liveries shared his admiration, and even the sad-coloured garbs of the puritans, and other sorrowful relics of the Cromwellian times, by which they were less distinguished than by their long hard-boned visages, excited his eager curiosity.

The city, as we now emphatically call it, was only beginning to lose its palmy dignity as the royal residence, and was still the haunt of fashion as of commerce. The enormous warehouses had not yet usurped the glittering line of shops and parti-coloured booths, where all that wealth and luxury could demand were collected by the toils of half the globe. The palaces of the nobility were mingled, as in the Middle Ages, with the merchants' marts, and the Tower itself was occasionally honoured by the presence of the king and court. Consequently, the scenes they now traversed were full of objects likely to kindle and gratify the curiosity of a boy like Mervyn, educated in such seclusion. Every gilded coach, as it rolled past with its pageantry of hanging and running footmen, raised his admiration, and many a wild romance shaped itself in his fancy, as the rich sedan, carefully closed, bore its burden

past, or some masked beauty tripped lightly from it, followed by her stalwart footmen with their gilded wands.

These agreeable objects quickly chased Mervyn's gloomy anticipations, and splendid visions, such as he had dreamed at St. Omer, succeeded in rainbow-coloured masses. This illusion was broken by the harsh tones of his conductor, who bade him suddenly halt; and looking up, he found himself before a huge, irregular pile of buildings extending a great distance down a court to his right, and facing Aldersgate Street. This, as Oates briefly explained, was Thanet House, the residence of the Earl of Shaftesbury, whom the court accused of fixing his abode there to carry on a more uninterrupted intercourse with the city, then the great strength of the Whig or country party. Oates knocked, and a tall porter, in very rich livery, made his appearance; he inquired if his lordship was at home "to a humble servant of the suffering Church, Dr. Oates." The porter replied that the earl had visitors with him, but that he doubted not his reverence would be welcome; and he commissioned a lackey to inquire, while another guided the doctor and Mervyn into a waiting-room, where they were left.

At the period at which our story has now arrived, the great masses of the people were firmly persuaded that a laborious policy, or rather conspiracy, was at work, to consummate the ruin of the constitution and of the Protestant Church, by introducing popery, as it was called, and arbitrary government on the detested model of France.

This conviction had obtained a deep and settled possession of the public mind, and, as subsequent events proved, it was but too well founded. The political horizon was black with the impending tempest, though no man could with certainty predict from what point it would burst. But Oates, or rather the great party which used him as its instrument, had long since decided that it should be from that quarter which would collect again all the scattered thunderbolts of the commonwealth, and lash to madness that wild ocean of fanaticism which had so long slumbered as if beneath the wand of an enchanter. And this lightning was to be brought down from heaven itself. Religion, which had broken so many chains, was again to be invoked from her starry throne, to wave the sword and torch over mankind.

Different and even opposed as were the wishes and intentions of the various existing factions, all were united on certain great points by the skill and energy of a great political leader, a man born to be the master-spirit of a stormy crisis, such as that which was fast approaching. The "false Achitophel" of Dryden, that Shaftesbury, whose name seems the type of the bold, restless, Machiavellian policy which sprang from the sanguinary school of Richelieu, and adapting itself to the milder forms of the age, still did not scruple to employ violent means under a darker disguise—Shaftesbury was at this period the great idol of popularity, the head of the parliamentary opposition to Charles, the centre of all the intrigues against the government. His talents, reckless daring, and unscrupulous morality, his personal hatred of the king and his brother, eminently qualified him for the tempestuous pilotage he had assumed; and his keen sarcastic wit, vehement oratory, and perfect knowledge of the men and motives of his time, rendered him almost unique as a popular leader. The insults and wrongs he had suffered from the court, which had only used him as a tool, his degradation from the chancellorship, which he had held with high reputation, and his recent imprisonment in the Tower, had raised him, in spite of his many shiftings and changes, to the rank of a popular martyr, and at the same time exasperated his inborn restlessness and impatience of control with the venom of personal and rancorous malignity.

The real wishes and objects of Shaftesbury are still a mystery, for they were so multifarious and changeable that no man can with certainty judge them, even in the silence of all those great passions and interests which have gone to repose with the turbulent generation that bred them. That he desired to see no power greater than his own is probable, for it was impossible for him to rest under any yoke; and the commonwealth men, the broken soldiery and discontented republicans of the Cromwell era, looked at him as their leader in the fierce strife for which they were silently bracing their loins.

On the other hand, the moderate party, who wished to see a monarchical but strictly constitutional government in England, followed Shaftesbury's counsels with blind zeal; and the still smaller faction, who chose the young Duke of Monmouth as their head, and aspired to thrust

him on the throne, also regarded him as their chief support. The principles of his youth, and the destructive tendencies of his own impetuous character, inclined Shaftesbury to the re-establishment of the republic; but a still more absorbing hatred of the Duke of York, whom he believed to be the author of his disgrace, inclined him to support the pretensions of the duke's hated rival.

The dreamers and enthusiasts of the old religious parties, who thought to establish a theocracy on earth, in imitation of that of Moses; the wild fanatics of the fifth monarchy scheme; the discontented dregs of the royalists; and even the timorous and wavering of the Catholic party, were all united by his singular and Protean art of infusing himself into all men's passions and motives. Thus was constituted a solid and powerful engine, wielded by the activity of one mind, which finally crushed all resistance; for the temporary success of Charles II. against his parliament was but the lull which preceded the earthquake of 1688.

It must not be supposed, however, that the clouds which were gathering rose from nought, at the command of a magician, and that the direful phantasmagoria which was shortly to be made visible by the fiendish glare of Oates's discoveries, were merely chimeras and shadows of unsubstantial horrors. A plot no doubt existed, though not in the sense and form given to it by the authors and supporters of the popish plot. It was a plan or conspiracy, having for its object the overthrow of the great heresy which had so long rent the Church, and the restoration of the dominion of the ancient religion. The impossibility of accomplishing this object with a free parliament, and without the assistance of military power, was the reason which, no doubt, induced the Jesuits to embrace the idea of establishing an arbitrary government as the basis of their operations. The general and established opinion of their intentions furnished Oates and his fellow-monsters with the groundwork of their plot, and took away all defence and disproof from the government, which neither dared nor could impugn the imaginary, without allowing the real conspiracy.

It was upon the threshold of these terrible storms of state that Mervyn sat tranquilly and unconsciously down, awaiting a summons which, though he knew it not, was the call of his destiny.

CHAPTER XVI

SHAFTESBURY AND HIS COLLEAGUES

THE lackey dispatched from Oates returned with a promptness which showed that the arrival was one by no means to be slighted, and desired them to follow to his lordship's presence. They ascended a richly-carved oaken staircase, terminated by a portal of the same material, which swung open, and revealed an extensive library of finely-bound books. This apartment was furnished with massive elegance, and ornamented with many articles of *virtu*.

In a deep recess, formed by a bay window, was a table spread with wine and comfits, at which sat three gentlemen, one of whom, a small but well-shaped man, very richly dressed, and with a very acute and intellectual cast of physiognomy, illumined by an eye of singular brilliancy, rose to greet them as they entered. The other gentlemen kept their seats. One of these was a dull, heavy-looking divine, with a fat, credulous face, and two little eyes deeply imbedded in the sockets. The other was evidently a man of great quality from his dress, which nevertheless had a careless, rakish appearance, not contradicted by the worn-out expression of a countenance, once extremely handsome, but now pale and sunken with excess. The extravagance of his dress did not, in this instance, dazzle Mervyn's judgment, for in the first glance he caught of the stranger he thought he detected something evil and sinister, which kindled a great dislike in his bosom.

"Honest, worthy Master Oates, true seeker of the manna, eschewing self, welcome home from St. Omer," exclaimed the earl, shaking Titus's hand with extreme cordiality. "But, softly, we have heard you are dubbed doctor. Welcome home, then, worthy doctor."

"I thank your lordship in all humility," replied Oates, abjectly bending. "I am here, in good sooth, and glad to be out of the jaws of the whale. But whom have we here, my loard? All safe?"

"Why, Gad-a-mercy, the light dazzles you, brother," said the earl. "See you not? A true champion of the

cause, my Lord Howard of Eskricke; and the blessed expounder of the word, whose labours have been crowned with such increase, Dr. Tongue."

"Ah, Master Oates—what, Dr. Oates?—welcome home," exclaimed both gentlemen, springing eagerly up.

Oates and his recognised friends embraced with seeming heartiness, and mutual recognitions having taken place, Lord Howard filled a goblet with a trembling hand, which he pushed to Oates, exclaiming, "Drink, boy, drink, and rest thy carcase and tell us the news."

"Ay, sit, good doctor," said Shaftesbury, smiling. "I had small hopes to welcome you home so scathless from the den of wolves. I did fear that even your tough heart might fail in the good but perilous fight."

"My strength was from above," replied Oates, meekly. "I glory not in my work, though it be well done; 'tis none of mine. It was the cause, my loard; the cause of a mightier than I, whose shoelatch I am not worthy to fasten, that supported me through all my trials."

"Ay, without such holy motives we should never get through half the sin of this world, doctor," said the earl, with a slight sneer. "But have you gathered any fuel for the fire, any useful information which may serve to set this wronged and deluded nation on its guard?"

"Know you aught of this most dreadful plot against our lives and liberties, whereof you warned us, even as a shepherd placed on a high rock shouteth to the herd on the precipice?" said Dr. Tongue, with an awestruck look at the venerable Titus.

"Oh, my loard, such a dreadful ploat has not been discovered since wicked Haman's," said Oates, turning his eyes up. "All our throats are to be cut, and the accursed popish superstitious idolatry brought in, over the carcase of Magna Charta and all our liberties."

"Why, then, there will be many a rogue the less, in a world that can well spare them," said Shaftesbury, with a satirical smile. "But what boy is this, doctor, whom you have brought in your skirts and apparently forgotten? Is he a young prophet—your Elisha?"

"Nay, my loard, but a poor novice of St. Omer, whom I have brought over to the true faith, and who is anxious to serve your loardship," replied Oates.

"Marry, Oates, he may be useful in cases that need two

witnesses—in the swearing drudgery," said the earl, eyeing Mervyn with a penetrating gaze. "Yet, 'slife! by that proud blush, I doubt you have scarce hit on the right nail. Are you willing to be of service to me, youth?"

"In all matters that may be without prejudice to my religion and honour," said Mervyn, sharply and even haughtily, for he was both surprised and disgusted with the strange assertion which Oates had made, though he dared not contradict it openly.

"Marry, 'tis a lad of mettle: what name may you give him, doctor?" said Lord Howard, who had been gazing for some minutes in deep and gloomy attention at the youth.

"They call him Mervyn, a poor Church foundling, son of some wild robber executed at St. Omer, and indebted to the crafty brothers of the college for life and education," said Titus, with a malignant smile at his victim.

"Ay, is it so?" said Howard, his complexion darkening; "I did think—but no matter. He is fitter for our work." And he drew his hand slowly over his brow, as if to wipe away some unpleasant recollection, then turned and swallowed a deep gulp of wine.

"Trouble not at thy parentage, youth," said the earl, observing the passions which struggled in Mervyn's countenance. "The greatest conquerors that have ever been were but successful robbers of mankind, and the founders of dynasties have all been traitors to humanity itself. Well, for the present, Oates, I leave him in your service. I know not where he may better serve a 'prenticeship to mine. And now, man, what new facts have you discovered of this royal treason? Is there aught direct against the Duke of York?"

"Most monstrous certainties, my loard, since I can clearly convict his secretary, Coleman, of a treasonable correspondence with France," replied Oates, vehemently.

"The duchess's secretary now," said the earl. "And thereupon I would advise you to be cautious how you fill up your great outlines, for it is on little matters that great ones hinge, and the discovery of a mistake in the smallest portion of your evidence will furnish your enemies with a battering-ram against the whole."

"Trust me, my loard, I shall ever have my crook raised, as one who expects the wolf," replied Oates, with a knowing

look. "But here is the brief extract or epitome of that which I have already discovered, and will, please God, sartify before the King and mighty of the land, even as holy Daniel in the presence of idolatrous Belshazzar, feasting on gold and purple, and turning the sacred utensils into vessels of abomination and iniquity. But methinks it were not amiss if the young acolyte, seeing he is as it were green and tender in the affairs of this world, do retire to yonder recess, where he may find sweet nutriment for thought in the precious tomes which your loardship's taste and generosity have collected."

Mervyn gladly took the hint, for he was embarrassed with the keen observation of Shaftesbury, and bowing slightly, crossed the room to the spot indicated. It was a richly-carved alcove, separated from the library by long curtains, which might be drawn at pleasure, so as to seclude the inmate, and was furnished with various luxurious appliances of study. He seated himself at a desk, on which lay an open volume of Lucretius, and seemed to be soon absorbed in the perusal, though from time to time he glanced at the opposite group with involuntary curiosity.

Oates continued speaking, for his thick, harsh voice was audible in an uninterrupted course, though the words were not sufficiently clear to make any sense to Mervyn. This was the more provoking, as what he said seemed to excite the most anxious attention in his hearers, and Dr. Tongue's foolish face was all agape with amazement. Oates's hypocritical countenance seemed also the index of a wondrous tale; but as the earl listened, an incredulous smile was lurking on his lips. Oates then appeared to produce his vouchers, and handed certain letters to his patron, which Mervyn had little doubt were part of those stolen at St. Omer. Shaftesbury took them with avidity, and Mervyn remarked a beam of joy light his sallow countenance as he murmured the contents over to his companions.

"This indeed strikes home!" he said, rising and stepping forward, as if the restlessness of his ambitious nature required even physical action. "This indeed strikes home!—my Lord Howard, what say you? Is not here a thunderbolt which, skilfully forged, will waken the nation from its lethargy, and shake the throne of this licentious Jupiter of ours?"

"Methinks 'tis high time, now that our religion and

constitution are in such mortal pass and jeopardy," replied his lordship, carelessly.

"Faith, Howard, for *our* religion and constitution, methinks they can incur no further damage," said Shaftesbury, smiling.

"Verily, these tidings will summon Israel as with a roar of brazen trumpets and drums," said Dr. Tongue.

"Yes, we shall live to shake the throne of the meek Nero," continued the earl, walking up and down in triumph. "The nation may yet be saved, and the glorious heritage our ancestors bought with their blood may be transmitted intact to our children. But, Oates, look that your tale be well told—and yet it rings like good metal. This design of the papists on the King's life—the resolution to place his brother on the throne, in order to introduce popery and to set parliaments aside, since their consent could not be obtained—combined with Coleman's cravings for money from France to raise an Irish army—are all admirable. But how will you prove it, doctor?"

"I will swear it, my loard!" replied Oates, energetically.

"Ay, but will folks believe us?" said Shaftesbury, with a peculiar glance of his glittering eye.

"Why, my loard, have I not seen, heard, felt, this accursed ploat?—have I not lived among the villanous Jesuits, listened at their doors, been at their consultations, carried messages, intercepted letters——"

"Why, sooth, you are the very bell-wether of black sheep—a white Judas!" interrupted the earl. "But we shall need some strong support, lest the King crush our discovery by some sudden exertion of prerogative, and then adieu, dear Dr. Oates, to your nose and ears."

"What needs more than your lordship's and other good pautriots?" said Titus, with a somewhat dismayed glance around.

"And, my good lord, methinks the nation is already well primed, and needs but a spark to bring out such an explosion as—as will blow this arbitrary court, and popery, and the Duke of York, and what not, to the devil!" said the Lord Howard, sipping his wine to fill up divers little pauses of hesitation. "But how, and when, and where shall we commence?" continued he. "'Slife! I am weary of the common side of the hedge, and would be again among

the clover. Besides, I am vexed and stung by those damnable gadflies, a man's creditors."

"Do you and Dr. Tongue, Oates, accost the King on his morning walk," said the earl. "Or, stay—Tongue knows one Kirby, a foolish chemist, who is oft admitted to the honour of cleaning his majesty's crucibles, and preparing some of those wonderful experiments of his, at which the court ladies clap their little hands and cry 'La!' What if he proposed the matter to the King?"

"What if all of us unitedly? I would not seem behind in my duty to the King's majesty, but this is a service for which he will thank no man," said Dr. Tongue, warmly.

"Ay, ay, doctor, 'tis known you have half an eye on the rich deanery of Wells, which is now held on the tenure of an apoplexy," said the earl, with his tart smile. "But, Oates, revealed only to the King, your discoveries may be stifled in the throes of bringing forth, wherefore we must also have it publicly deposed before some zealous magistrate, who will see it have fair play for life."

"Ay, indeed. What says your lordship to the godly and worshipful Master Bethel? he is a true servant of the cause," said Oates.

"A greedy curmudgeon! He did deny me a paltry hundred guineas on my own security," muttered the Lord Howard.

"No, no, not Bethel; he is too eager and headstrong," said Shaftesbury. "He would push the matter before its parts are fitted and coherent; it needs time to harden, and besides, I would not have it brought out too far before the parliament assembles, and we have had time to study its temper. No; take your deposition before Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, in Westminster. 'Twill seem the more impartial, as men rumour he is rather inclined to the papishers and court."

"My loard, I will obey you in all things; for as Gideon was sent by God to rally his scattered peoples——" began Oates, when the earl sharply interrupted him.

"Obey me! Not so, Mr. Oates!" he said. "I do think that in this transaction you follow the dictates of your own conscience; but, mark! no advice nor instigation of mine. I will have nothing to do with the midwifery of this discovery; but bring it forth, and perchance I shall prove a good gossip at the christening."

"Nay, good truth, but your loardship, as head of the true Magna Charta Church party, cannot but support me in my discovery of this horrid, bloody, and execrable ploat?" said Oates, very humbly.

"I shall in no respect be wanting in my duty to my country," replied the earl. "But you know me, Oates. I am not fond of working in the dark wheels of other men's contrivances. We must not appear to understand each other, or it will ruin all. What if they bring evidence to prove you were at St. Omer at these times when you say you were in England?"

"Paupish evidence, my loard, which is not to be suffered," said Oates, grinning. "Besides, I have this boy to swear I was not there till—till I choose."

"I tell you again, you have mistaken your drudge; there is some gentleman's blood in his veins," said Shaftesbury, thoughtfully.

"And how pale he looks, hanging over that book," said Howard, "as if he had been debauching it last night with me, at that drink-bushel Monmouth's! Is he hungry? Do you starve him, Oates, as Bethel does his cook? Odd's life! that puts me in mind 'tis noonday, Shaftesbury, and we are to dine with my Lord Russell, Sydney, and the other country people."

"Faith are we," said the earl, rising, "wherefore I must make scant manners with you, Dr. Oates, and bid you farewell until such time and place as I shall appoint, so soon as I shall have heard you are afloat."

Oates rose too, and, bowing profoundly, shook Tongue's hand, which was extended in eager friendship towards him.

"But I have forgotten a small matter," said the earl, drawing Oates aside. "How are you off for the King's portraits, old boy? Ha, wouldst dislike this small nest o' 'em?"

"Owing to your lordship's liberality, I lack nothing," replied Titus, condescending, however, to take the offered purse.

"Nay, nay, you must not want," said Shaftesbury, with a smile. "If the state knows not how to honour virtue, I do; and thereby honour myself. Young man," he added, turning to Mervyn, whom Oates had beckoned out of his studio, "I see you are of rising metal: do but what this

worthy gentleman tells you, and you will live to see great things."

Mervyn choked the reply which rose to his lips with some difficulty, and after the usual ceremonies of adieu, the worthy Oates marched off with his young coadjutor.

"There he goes, for a most pestilent liar, thief, and demagogue!" exclaimed Howard, almost as the door swung on his heels. "I do marvel your lordship will have anything to do with such a vicious, perjured, blasphemous, foul-mouthed, monstrous——"

"Egad, brother! you would not have me clean a pig-sty with a silver fork," interrupted the earl. "The man is fit for his work, and his work for the man, and, as the saints say, did not the end sanctify the means, I could be loth to——but it is dinner-hour, and we must not keep my Lord Russell's stately lady waiting."

And the politicians moved off together, leaving Dr. Tongue to finish the bottles alone.

CHAPTER XVII

SAINT OATES

After this satisfactory interview, Oates left Thanet House in a state little short of ecstasy, and Mervyn shared the genial effects of his good-humour. He leaned patronisingly on his arm, and began talking with him very familiarly, asking him how he liked the earl, his mansion, and the splendid dress of the Lord Howard. "You see, child," he said, with swelling importance, "I have not deceived you; I am a man of some little consequence in England, and may turn out more than you yet dream, boy."

"But what is all this coil about—these strange metamorphoses, these unlicensed assertions in which you deal, Mr. Oates?" said Mervyn, hastily; for little as he had overheard of the late scene, and small as his knowledge of the world most certainly was, the high rank of the personages, and much of Oates's conduct filled him with suspicion and inquietude.

"I cannot and will not explain aught at present, child,"

said Brother Titus, after a glance of rat-like alarm at the youth. "But know that I—that I—Taitus Oates, will soon be as much dictator of this good nation as ever was Sylla of the Roman state. In my hands shall be the judgment of life and death, triumph or defeat. You have but to support me, child, and your fortune is made."

Leaving his young victim time to ruminate on these strange anticipations, Oates plunged into a chaos of entangled alleys and by-streets, whence he emerged in the Strand, near St. Clement's. He proceeded a short distance, and arrived before a silversmith's shop, which displayed a scanty set-out of glittering wares in the window, and suddenly entered. There was a large, fat, and eminently foolish-looking man sitting at work, with an ill-looking pug-nosed apprentice, chasing some ornaments for a fruit-basket. Oates's entrance caused them both to look up, and the master's countenance underwent a curious succession of changes, from a very deep and evidently disagreeable surprise to a forced expression of delight.

"Good lard! Mr. Oates! who'd a-thought it?" he exclaimed, and, as the fashion of the day was, locking his visitor in a fraternal embrace. This was followed by an earnest invitation into his little back parlour, which, coupled with an assurance that he was just going to dine, proved irresistible.

"Well, and where have you been so long, forgetting all your old friends?" said the silversmith, when he had comfortably established his visitors in immense oak chairs.

"Oh, among the Jesuits, raking out all their execrable practices—but you will soon hear more, Master Prance," replied Oates, significantly.

"Well, but in good truth, things are tending very much that way," said Prance, with an attempt at the style jocular. "He! he! they say, now, that the short road to Rome is by Oxford. 'Slids! Master Oates, I do sometimes think of turning papisher myself, for that's the cork to swim with now-a-days. And what a fine religion that is for gold and silversmiths' work! For my part, I don't care how soon it comes in. All I can say is, times can't be worse, Protestant as they are. Do but look here, what beautiful goldwork I am beating into this choice Genoa velvet, for the queen's chapel."

"The mantle of the Scarlet Woman of Babylon!" ex-

claimed Oates. "Oh, Brother Prance, I am grieved to hear you talk so far adrift. What is all this pomp but leaven of earth, fleshpots of Egypt, vapours from the nostrils of Satan? But what are the news at home, for I am but just landed? How is your worthy lady? I trust her soul prospers."

"Ay, and her body too; she grows fatter and fatter every day," said Prance, with a melancholy smile. "Ay, and rules the roast still, Mr. Oates, I warrant me. Her soul, quotha! she saved that long ago, or there's no salvation to be had for love or money."

"She was, indeed, a zealous seeker of the manna, and, with a blessing from above, I have often assisted her to find it," replied Oates, piously. "Well, well, I am glad to hear she is fat. It looks like good keeping, Master Prance."

"Adzooks! it's as much as I can do to keep her and her retinue of canting soul-savers," exclaimed Prance, hastily.

"Ay, indeed; and who is her spiritual adviser at present?" said Oates, his complexion darkening.

"Marry, now, be not jealous, in a ghostly sense," said Prance, laughing. "For since you left us, Master Oates, she hath run from light to light, from teacher to teacher, without any constancy, and complains that the pillar of fire is vanished from the wilderness, and that she stumbles in her ways."

"Poor soul!" said Oates, with a grim smile. "Well, Master Prance, let us have your merriest news first."

"Nay, the prettiest I wot of, is concerning a crafty adventure of Claude Duval's," said the silversmith, laughing. "I marvel at that fellow, and how he hath so long eluded law and justice."

"So do not I, seeing he is so unchary of his cash, that he hath alway a friend in need," replied Oates. "Mind you not of the time at Salisbury, when he and the catchpoles got drunk together, and he escaped in one of their apparels? Marry, he served me a scurvy trick many years agone, when he was but commencing his villanies; but I have long since Christianly forgiven him, for certain considerations. We should not quarrel now if we met—unless I had a troop of dragoons at my elbow."

"Is Claude Duval a famous robber?" said Mervyn, somewhat eagerly.

"Yea, and what is that to you, boy?" replied Oates, with a suspicious glance at him. "Doth it seem to you as if every thief were a relation of yours?"

Mervyn looked confused, and was silent.

"Nay, brother," interposed Prance, "but what trick did he play you? His tricks are all so merry."

"Tut! I have forgotten and forgiven it. He robbed me in the forest of Clairvaux—he didn't get much by it, though," said Oates, with a chuckling laugh. "But what new trick is this he hath played?"

"Oh, la, so mighty funny! 'twere enough to make a skeleton grin," said the silversmith. "You know old avaricious Bethel, that was the famous sheriff?—and, behold you, last week comes a letter from one of his correspondents in Darby, offering him a wonderful bargain in sheepskins, but forsooth, he must go well provided with cash—hard cash. Off he goes, and, for saving, without any attendant, on an old horse, with a heavy bag of gold; and between Darby and Ashby, on the moor there, what meets him but Mr. Duval, who makes him surrender all he has. And when he goes to Darby, light of his bags, he finds me out that his correspondent knows no more about sheepskins than the mutton, and it was all a trick of Duval's. Ha! ha!"

"But they say he is mighty courteous and civil to his prisoners," said Oates, joining the laugh despite his assumed gravity; "in especial to the ladies, wherein he is a Frenchman to the backbone."

"Agad, that he is," said Prance, wiping his eyes, which ran over with mirth. "Have you heard what passed between him and beautiful Mistress Aurora Sydney? My Lord Leicester, some few months ago, was coming to town in his coach-and-six, with his footmen and flambeaumen and what not, and his lady granddaughter, Mistress Aurora, with him. She was coming to the court to be presented, on occasion of being named maid of honour to the Queen, at the personal request of the Lord Shaftesbury, just before he was knocked out of office. He! he! he! But that's neither here nor there. Well, well, as I was saying, Claude Duval and a lot of his fine fellows meets 'em on Hounslow as sure as a ghost, and there was nothing for it but stand and deliver. And when Claude looks in the coach, seeing such a charming young lady in it (for they

say she beats even Mistress Stuart, and my Lady Castlemaine is a fool to her), what does he do but insist on dancing a minuet with her. And in spite of all her ifs and ans, out she must upon the heath, and, it being a fine moonlight night, foot it away for a highwayman's pleasure. But I have heard Jack the coachman say he danced as solemnly as any courtier, with his hat under his arm; and she, being a witty pleasant lady, was so taken with the mirth of the thing that she danced as if with his Majesty. And after the minuet he hands her safely back to my lord, who was nigh bursting with rage, and saying he could not think of robbing so perfect a lady of her adornments, gives her back a casket which contained her jewels. And away they go without further molestation."

"A marvellous pretty tale, an it be true," said Oates, with an uneasy glance at Mervyn. "But know you, brother, *por acaso*, as the Spaniard hath it, where Colonel Sydney now is?"

"In England, but rather under cover," said Prance. "He hath not yet obtained formal permission to appear, but he came back to attend the old earl's death-bed, and is now in a sort of hide-and-seek at Lord Howard's house, who is his special friend."

"Ay, indeed? And prithee, is there any news concerning that persecuted Protestant, Colonel Blood? Is he still at hide-and-seek with the law about that affair of the Duke of Ormonde?"

"Yes, and dare not be seen for his life," said the silversmith, shrugging his shoulders. "Why, Mr. Oates, that was a terrible affair! My Lord Ossory swears to make mincemeat of him wherever they meet; and though Blood cares as little for threats as any man, there is a warrant out, and a reward of a thousand guineas for his apprehension. I warrant me he is in one of his old lurking-places in Whitefriars. But here comes dinner, by my nose—boiled beef, boiled beef, Mr. Oates! and here comes Goody Prance in all her bravery."

Mrs. Prance entered as he spoke. She was a tall, fat, jolly woman, very fair and well-conditioned, with a little pouting sensual mouth, good colour, and excellent eyes. She was dressed irresistibly, in her Sunday kirtle and a handsome sacque, with a huge chain of blue stones crimping

into her fat neck, and with her hair very finely curled, powdered, and scented.

The greeting between Oates and this fair lady was edifying, from its affectionate eagerness and the large blush which overspread her vast bosom and cheeks, as Oates squeezed her hand in silence for several moments, while she poured forth her acknowledgments for the honour of his visit.

They now sat down to a hearty substantial repast in the olden style, beef with suet dumplings, and such small matters as Mrs. Prance had hastily cooked up for the distinguished guest, and strong ale and brandy, which had the additional zest, as Prance whispered, of being contraband. Oates ate away at everything before him with shark-like voracity, and seasoned the feast with deep draughts of the brown home-brewed, all the time discoursing, very lengthily and eloquently, about the state of religion and the persecution which the Church laboured under; and Mervyn thought at moments that the doctor's discourse had somehow or other a more earthly meaning, which Mrs. Prance understood. This was particularly remarkable at those times when Mr. Prance was called out to attend some customer, though the dialogue still continued in that allegorical and mystic style affected by the saints of the period.

"Ah, Sister Prance!" groaned Oates, on one of these occasions, "I do grieve to see how the withered leaves still hang on a fruitful vine, and that the unhappy paupistical blindness is still on that stray sheep, your husband, for all he hides it carefully under the veil of the ark, like a rotten sore covered with a golden plaster."

"Yes, verily; 'tis not in man or woman's wit to save a beam of wood from the burning temple, though it be of the cedar of Lebanon, worthy Master Oates," replied the lady. "I'm sure I've tried, soul and body, and now he is unhappily hardened in his idolatries by the Queen's giving him her Romish idols to make, and his belief that the Brazen Calf is once more to be set up among us."

"He will live to repent it, poor man," sighed Oates.

"But you don't take a drop of anything, doctor," said Mrs. Prance, filling his glass with brandy. "I am sorry as the widow of Sarepta, dear master, that I have nothing worthier of a prophet in Israel; but such as I have is

entirely at your service. But, godly Master Oates, I do pray and hope, on my bended knees, you will never breathe a word of my poor husband's prevarication, which I trusted to you in strict confidence that, knowing where the shoe pinched him, you might apply spiritual salve and lint to his wounds."

"Heaven forbid, Madame Prance, Heaven forbid!" said Oates. "We will but weep and pray over him, and reveal not our cognisance of his frailty. But I am minded that I cannot indulge me longer in your company, for this season," said the reverend gentleman, after listening to a cuckoo clock over the fire. "It is nigh three o'clock, and I have calls on my time which even you do not understand, sister in love."

"Pooh, pooh, man! you'll stay and taste a dish of mulled sack I have warming," said honest Prance, who returned at this moment. "Why, there are some of the rarest apples roasted you ever caught sight of, all from the king's garden at Hampton."

But Oates, for some reason which he did not find it necessary to explain, declined even this genial invitation, and declaring his business admitted of no delay, took his departure. The usual greetings were exchanged, and once more Mervyn found himself following his worthy master through the hot noonday streets, in great tribulation as to his own position and prospects. He was now convinced that he had committed a great but irreparable act of folly, in trusting himself to the protection of this false brother. Still, he felt that anything was better than the ignominy from which, he thought, his flight had saved him. His situation was, nevertheless, even to one so young and thoughtless, sufficiently embarrassing. He beheld himself without friends or relations, in a strange country, in the power of a man who, to his extreme surprise, he found to be an apostate from the religion he professed, and who seemed engaged in dark and dangerous manœuvres, involving the greatest personages and events. But his moneyless condition forced him still to temporise; against which, as a matter of morality, his education among the Jesuitical casuists presented no obstacle. He, however, determined to seize the first opportunity which presented itself, to escape from the trammels of his hypocritical master.

CHAPTER XVIII

A ROYAL REVEL

On leaving Prance's house, Oates directed his course to the river, where he hired a sculler, ordering the boatmen to convey them to Whitefriars, and land at Water Lane. Mervyn was of course ignorant of the evil fame of the locality, and if he had not been so, Oates was not in a humour to consult his opinions on the subject. Still, he thought he had never seen any place that seemed a fitter receptacle for the off-scum of fermenting multitudes, the sink of a great city's crimes and wretchedness.

The entrance of Water Lane was distinguished by a rude stone cross, marking the bounds of the sanctuary, and near this, day and night, stood sentinel one of the Friars, as the refugees were called, with a horn at his girdle, to give the signal for mustering forces when any sheriff's officers made their appearance without a military force (which they seldom did), and then to give the alarm to their intended prey. Once past this sacred line of demarcation, a maze of dark narrow lanes, blind alleys, and courts, very conveniently ending on the water, presented themselves to the bewildered stranger.

The population of this wild district was of a character extremely suitable to the haggard desperation of their local habitation. Whitefriars, or Alsatia, as it was called in the slang of the day, had reached its highest excess of nuisance under Charles II. as a sanctuary for all manner of crimes and lawless villanies. Fugitive debtors, murderers and robbers—bad men and women of every shade of vice and misery—were there congregated, in open and almost secure defiance of the law. Debauchery of every kind rioted in undisturbed impunity. Brandy-shops, gaming houses, and others of a still more revolting character, whence, night and day, issued the roar of ruffianly contention, ending not unfrequently in murder, a few shops kept by Jews, devoted ostensibly to the sale of old rags and kitchen stuff, and some filthy lanes in which a clamorous fish market was carried on, seemed the only means of subsistence possessed by a part of the inhabitants; but

the great majority lived no man knew how. Thieves and beggars, who spent the day exercising their gifts in other parts of the metropolis, came here to roost at night, and scatter in debauchery what they had earned at the risk of their necks. Occasionally, however, might be seen the gaunt withered frame and threadbare garb of some unhappy debtor, forced to take refuge in this horrible place from the fangs of his creditors. Nevertheless, this district, lawless as it appeared, was governed by certain regulations, which for the common good were rigidly enforced, among which was most remarkable the law by which all were bound to resist any invasion by justice *vi et armis*.

Oates stopped before a public-house on the borders of the Temple, which had for sign a battered coat of arms over the gate, under which was hewn in stone—"The Heaven." But as it happened that this house, which was part of the ruined palace of the bishops of Salisbury, had escaped with little damage from the great fire, the pious owner had added the title of "The Brand from the Burning." Oates paused a moment to adjust his coif, and the youth happening to raise his eyes, read with surprise the motto round the shield—"Esperance and advance, Mervyn!"

He pointed this name out to Oates, who said in a gruff tone, "Ay, ay, there are more Toms in York than one. Your rogue of a father gave you the name of a family he served, but henceforth I bestow upon you one more appropriate, and presume not to prick thine ears to any sound but Ichabod."

He then stalked majestically into the house, and was met by an hostess, whose flushed face, disordered garb, and rakish eye bore tokens of recent inebriation. Nevertheless, she rejoiced in a name which promised better things, and was in truth our old friend, Temperance Bradley. Of her Oates inquired whether Mr. Butcherlaw was there.

"And what do you want with him, my master?" replied the hostess, eyeing him suspiciously. "If you mean to do any good with the colonel you should have brought a file of musketeers."

"I am his friend, good woman," said the doctor. "Why, Mistress Bradley, do you forget an old friend in a new dress, or are you too proud to own him?"

"Good lackadaisy! Captain Oates in a parson's rind!" exclaimed she, cordially returning his salute. "What, on your tricks again? Well, if you must see him, he's upstairs drinking and boozing with some ruffling gallants of the court, come on purpose to see him now he's in trouble."

"Tell him, good madam, I must see him directly, alone, in your little back tap," said Oates, stepping on through some barrels into a little dark room, with the air of one familiar with the place: "and let them bring me a pint of your best red canary, with a toast."

Mrs. Bradley nodded, and Oates closed the door on himself and his companion. Disgusted and weary with the day's occupation, Mervyn refused any share of the liquor, although Oates pressed him with a quaint smile, and seated himself moodily in the window-sill. He sat looking into a ruffianly court below, until Butcherlaw, or, as the reader has perhaps divined, Colonel Blood, made his appearance.

Years had made little perceptible alteration in the athletic frame of this worthy, but a good deal in his dress, for he was clad in a very worn and faded garb, though once of rich materials. His face was deeply flushed with wine, and he had altogether the look of one disturbed in some drunken debauch. Mervyn remarked that while he wrung Oates's hand with affected cordiality, he glanced round, and that, as their eyes met, his complexion grew livid as lead. On his own part, he felt an inconceivable dread at the mere sight of the man, which induced him to turn aside, and divert his unpleasant feelings by watching a fight between two ragged boys in the court below.

Meanwhile the two friends discoursed in a low key, and in a cant which Mervyn did not understand; but at last Oates turned to him and said, "This is the young gentleman, Mr. Butcherlaw. This is Mr. Butcherlaw, Ichabod, who is a near relation of yours, and will tell you all about your parentage, when time serves. At present he is good enough to take you under his protection till we can do better for you."

The colour again forsook the colonel's countenance as Mervyn looked at him with extreme eagerness; but he muttered something about his satisfaction at the office, and wiped the dark dew from his brow with an ague-like shudder over his whole frame.

Tell me then who is my father—is he alive?" said Mervyn, hastily.

"I have told you, sirrah, that this question is forbidden you at present," said Oates, severely. "In a short time the objection to telling you will be removed; till then you remain as I have said."

Mervyn felt strongly inclined to inquire by what right he was thus turned over to a stranger, but the bait thus artfully thrown out, and his own forlorn condition, deprived him of power. Oates then bestowed his blessing upon the boy, and observed to the colonel that he should take a sculler, and attend a godly meeting which he heard was to take place in Holborn Fields.

"Tut, man! never lie to the devil," said Blood, coarsely. "Thou'lt deceive neither him nor me. Say at once thou art away to see thy old acquaintance, Mother Creswold."

"Mr. Butcherlaw, you are in liquor," said Oates, with dignity. "But you will be sober enough when we meet again."

And with a peculiar glance at Mervyn, the meaning of which he could not in the least fathom, he left the apartment.

"If ever the fiend took human shape——" muttered Blood, but checking himself, he turned to Mervyn, and asked whether he had dined. Mervyn replied in the affirmative, but he remarked that the colonel watched him as he spoke with intense interest, and seemed rather listening to the sound of his voice than to what he said. He then took a turn or two in the room, and stopped abruptly. "Be of good cheer, youth," he said in a low tone. "I like your appearance, and will prove a better friend than most relations. Follow me; I mean to introduce you to some of the best society in England." And with a swagger of no common significance, he strode up a dark narrow staircase, Mervyn following, though with considerable repugnance.

As they mounted, Mervyn distinguished sounds of loud merriment from above, a chorus of voices roaring out some bacchanal staves, to an accompaniment of clashing goblets and thumps on the table. Blood went first, and threw open the door of a large apartment, battered and decayed, but evidently the relics of one of considerable magnificence. Indeed, it was a remnant of the episcopal

palace of whose ruins the inn consisted. There was a table in the middle covered with wine, fruit, dice, and a steaming bowl of punch, round which sat a number of gallants.

Mine host of the Heaven, large-nosed Simon Bradley, presided over the nectar, and was at the moment rolling in his chair in a fit of laughter, caused by an observation of one of the guests, a tall, dark, muscular man, dressed in a flaunting livery. Next to him sat two gallants, who looked like worn-out rakes of the town, but both handsome, well-made men, whose high-bred manners strangely contrasted with their out-of-elbow appearance. There was a fourth, whose glittering habiliments instantly attracted Mervyn's attention. He was a handsome gallant-looking cavalier, verging perhaps on forty, with long curled hair, moustache and beard of the newest cut. His dress was somewhat military, though not strictly the uniform of any service. He wore blue slashed small-clothes, high boots, and a scarlet coat richly laced, a collar of the finest work, jewels on his fingers, and a cocked hat. A long basket-hilted sword hung by his side from a steel band, and a pair of pistols lay at hand on his cloak.

"What! an addition to our company?" exclaimed the gentleman in livery.

"Ay, faith, and a proper addition too, Old Rowley," returned Blood. "My nephew, gentlemen, just arrived from foreign parts."

"What, hath he been cooling his heels in the Low Countries, running from the French?" said one of the gallants. "Or hath he been to the Italian, studying the art of cutting throats in the refined manner?"

"Nay, he hath been but lately in France, Saint Wilmot," replied the colonel.

"Oh, I understand—at Paris, learning to poison under Brinvilliers?" replied Wilmot.

"By the mass, no! he looks an honest youth—I say it, though he be thy nephew, Butcherlaw," said the personage styled Rowley. "What say'st thou, boy—art honest as times go?"

"Methinks it will not increase my welcome to this good company if I say yes," replied Mervyn. "Yet he who says no is a false knave, and lies."

"Why, then, thou art a very great curiosity," said

Wilmot. "Honest! prithee, let me see thy face; thou art as rare as a squeaking mandrake."

"You had as well look at a basilisk, for an honest eye must needs shame you to stone," said Mervyn, vehemently, for he was irritated by the mode of this reception.

"Well answered, by these nails!" shouted Rowley. "Come hither, boy; I like thee. Thou hast a ready wit and a daring—and as times go, these are good qualities. Sit thee here beside me. Methinks there is some favour in thy countenance which I should remember, could I see through the hogshead of punch in my skull. But the image I should recall wavers in its glimmer. Wilmot, whom doth he flavour of?"

"My father must have travelled in England, since I am likened to so many," said Mervyn.

"Faith, Hackum, it strikes me too," said Blood, addressing the cavalier in scarlet, who was gazing with remarkable earnestness at Mervyn. "Deem you not he smacks something of your once master, the lord who murdered himself in the Tower?"

"Say, rather, who was murdered," replied the cavalier, in a low tone. "*Sainte Vierge!* but 'tis even so. Prithee, boy, look not on me; thine innocent eyes do seem to reproach my villanous friendship with this man."

"Thy villanous friendship!" exclaimed the colonel, fiercely. "Why, sirrah, did I not get you out of the galleys some short ten years agone, furnish you with the file and crowbar, have a boat waiting for you, and finally hide you in Alsatia till the hue and cry was over?"

"And then you took advantage of my despair, and made me what I am," said the cavalier, obviously much excited. "But for the life you gave me, did I not break the oath which bound me to avenge my master's blood in yours? And have I not repaid the service many times? But, villain, I have shaken thy trammels off again! My master's ghost is here, and I will have thy life, or thou mine—so have at thee!"

"Fool!—he is mad with brandy and lemons," said Blood, contemptuously. "Look you, gentlemen, how the chance resemblance of an Irish nose and eyes to some English ones, long since rotted into dust——"

"What! were you born in Ireland, boy?" said the cavalier, eagerly.

"Faith, I know more of his parentage than he knows himself," said the colonel. "And I promise you, 'tis a chick from a real Irish egg."

"Tell me, boy, who was thy father?" continued Hackum.

"I had no father, sir, that ever I knew," said Mervyn, innocently.

"Nay, there is a proverb concerning that," said Wilmot.

"And born in Ireland?" muttered Hackum.

"Come, come, friend, let not the wine make a fool of thee," said Blood, coaxingly. "Thou knowest it is not safe to jest with me."

"For whoso sups with the devil should have a long spoon," said Wilmot, laughingly.

"Menace not me, Blood. I despise thee and thy threats," returned the cavalier. "'Slife! thou hast told me lies unnumbered, how thou didst mistake my purpose that night—thought I was sold to the villanous countess, forsooth, and, touched with compassion, laboured his rescue. But I did never put faith in thee, and will choke my thoughts no longer. I tell thee, Blood, despite all the enterprises wherein we have been brothers, thou art a black and felonious murtherer!"

"You lie, scoundrel! I did never slay any man but in fair fight," roared the colonel, yielding to his hitherto suppressed fury.

"Ha! the lie! take it back again with this, thou cruel ruffian!" returned Hackum, and seizing a decanter, he dashed it at Blood's head, but it missed, and fell from the opposite wall in fragments on the floor.

With a savage cry, resembling that of some wild beast, Blood sprang forward, his sword flashing out, and meeting that of Hackum with a fury which sent sparks around. The whole company rose in confusion.

"Rochester, Buckingham, part them," exclaimed Rowley, seizing the colonel's arm. "Blood, I command you, sheathe your slit-bully. What drunken brawl is this? Marry, is the gentleman some partisan of the Ormondes?"

"I am none of the faction—I scorn it," said the cavalier, fiercely. "Unhand me, sirs: 'tis an old quarrel suppressed many years; but there is truth in wine, and I tell you he is a monstrous atrocious villain, not fit to live."

"Tut! every man knows that; have you nothing new

to urge against him?" interposed Rowley, in a peace-making tone. "Heard you ever of a man who became a White Friar for his virtues?"

"But the man is a devil!" shouted Hackum, boiling up again, after a glance at the pale and affrighted countenance of Mervyn. "He is a devil! a devil! a devil! Confess, thou villain! didst thou not with that felonious hand murder the noble Lord Aumerle, when he was a prisoner in the Tower?"

Blood raised his sword irresolutely, but Rowley held him back; his lips were covered with foam, and he looked black in the face, as if about to fall into a fit.

"What, man alive, art dreaming?" exclaimed Wilmot. "My dear friend, believe me the punch hath flooded your judgment. Why, everybody in England knows the Lord Aumerle committed suicide in the Tower, the night of the great fire."

"Beware, sirrah, beware!" said Blood, his teeth chattering with rage, "or by this light of heaven, I will reveal who you are."

"What care I? have you a file of the King's guards at your heels?" returned Hackum. "Gentlemen, I care not; hear me! I am Claude Duval—Claude Duval, the highwayman!"

"Claude Duval!" echoed all the gallants, with great astonishment.

"Yes, Claude Duval, sirs. Shrink not back—I have met you in friendship, and no man lives who can say that Claude Duval ever betrayed his religion or his friend."

"Are you the great robber?" exclaimed Mervyn. "Why, then, I rank myself on your side. For all he says he is my uncle, robbers are of a nearer kindred to me."

"I am proud to make your acquaintance, gallant Duval," said Rowley, after a moment's pause. "Here is my hand; I have long wished to see you, for of all the rogues in England, you are the only one that dares to be a villain like a man."

"Why, so say I," exclaimed Wilmot; "so let us all be sociable and friendly, man; you are in sooth the only honest robber of us all."

"But methinks you wrong your friend, the colonel," said Rowley. "He introduced you as a merry companion

to our meeting, and if you be so much a gentleman as we have heard it said, you should not interrupt our fellowship with a private quarrel. Why, man, I was on the jury which judged my Lord Aumerle a suicide, and we did it on perfect proof. I saw with my own eyes that it was impossible for any one to have got in to murder him; there were three massive locked doors, man, and unless the colonel could get in at the keyhole——"

"Besides," interrupted Wilmot, "why should he murder him when he had only to leave his dagger's work to the axe of the law?"

"It is a belief which I will stick to in my dying hour," said Claude, in a melancholy voice, and with tears standing in his eyes. "But, gentlemen, as you say, there is no proof, and every man is innocent till he is found out; it will be judged some day."

"I have borne more from thee, Duval, than ever I thought at any man's hand," said Blood, slowly dropping his sword's point.

"Yes, truly. I am of use to you," replied Duval. "But, thank Heaven, you have never coaxed me into any of your bloody deeds, though I have shared more of your crafts and robberies than I shall know how to account for."

"What, were you not with me in the rescue of Captain Mason from the dragoons?" said the colonel, with a black smile.

"Ay, but it was man to man, a fair fight," returned Claude.

"Nonsense, man! the wine darkens your better judgment," said Blood, sheathing his sword. "And so my quarrel was with the wine, and not with Claude Duval. Here is my hand, sir, and reserve your cold iron for cold hearts."

The persuasions of the company induced Claude, with much reluctance, to accept the offered hand, which was remarkable for huge size and the deformity of its thumb. All then resumed their seats, and the host suddenly made his appearance from under the table, where he had taken refuge. A fresh bowl of punch was ordered in, and Rowley laboured, not without success, to restore the joviality of the meeting. By degrees all recollection of the recent quarrel vanished in copious draughts of the nectar, and

Mervyn saw with astonishment, that as they grew more and more intoxicated, the belligerents' rancour decreased, until at last they actually embraced each other, protesting they were the best friends in life.

Accustomed to the sobriety and severe decency of manners enforced at St. Omer, almost every word he heard brought blushes to Mervyn's young cheek, and he sat gazing and listening like an innocent shepherd straying by chance on the orgies of satyrs. The free opinions delivered on all topics—women, religion, laws human and divine—made his ears tingle with shame; but there was something fatally captivating in the licentious vivacity of these gallants. Rowley seemed a man of great humour; there was a satirical depth in what he said, which showed a long acquaintance with mankind, and his two companions were evidently men of great parts and brilliant wit. But even these two were distinguished by deep shades of character. Wilmot's wit was bitter, misanthropical, tinged with gloom, at times, at others libertine to excess; Villiers's was rather sparkling and ambitious than malignant, yet often extremely sarcastic, especially when rattling away at Wilmot, with whom he waged a continued skirmish of repartees.

Mervyn thought he could discern that these companions were of higher rank than they pretended to be, and there was something of mastery assumed by Rowley, to which all the others seemed to yield. Still he was shocked with the irreligion and blasphemy which all seemed to take pride in displaying. But Rowley continued to drown his scruples in laughter and wine. In vain he resisted; he was jeered at as a milksop, and forced to swallow glass on glass, till, excited by the liquor and his own natural vivacity, he launched out in a style of daring which, from its freshness, seemed to delight those wild companions.

CHAPTER XIX

A NIGHT IN ALSATIA

"Thou art a merry little dog, Ichabod, with thy Jewish name!" said Rowley, throwing himself back in his chair. "Methinks I shall love thee, and be of service to thee."

"Canst thou eat mutton, child, then?" said Wilmot, smiling. "If so, thy fortune is made."

"Ay, that can I, but fat venison better," replied Mervyn.

"'Fore heaven, Rowley, and is not this better than churning our brains to curds in the whirligig of state affairs?" said Villiers, blowing the froth from his punch into Rowley's plate.

"Yea, this is the only life for men of sense—an it would last for ever," said Wilmot, with a sigh. "What sings old sage Anacreon?"

"Could gold prolong our life's brief span,
One moment snatch from fate,
I, too, would heap the glittering dross;
I, too, toil early—late;
That if Death chanced to journey nigh,
He might take something and pass by.

"But if one cannot purchase life
Why sigh in vain and weep?
And if Death's steps are fated, how
Can gold resist his sweep?
So be it mine to grow divine,
'Mid genial friends, in purple wine!"

"I have noted thee, Jack, these latter times," said Rowley, as Wilmot concluded his recitation. "And take my word for't, thou wilt not die in the jolly fellow's faith. Thou wilt repent and turn a whiner."

"Of a surety and verily, for his spirit quaileth," said Villiers, with a sanctimonious twang. "Mind you not last summer when he had the fever, how he winced, and called in the harsh Scotch canter, Burnet, to pray by his bedside?"

"The devil was sick then, gallants," replied Wilmot. "Well, well, fill up your glasses—but though it be a merry life to lead, I doubt me if it end in so cheery a death."

"Pooh, pooh, man! enjoy life while it lasts, and take death when it comes," said Blood. "Why, Jack, the saint and the sinner both come to the same thing—a statue cut in flesh, that's all."

"I warrant me, you have chiselled many such a statue with your dagger and Toledo, Blood," said Duval. "And, to my thought, I can see one of your handiwork even now."

"What canst thou see, fool?" said the colonel, giving a fearful glance round the apartment, and with a forced laugh he began sipping his wine.

"Let us have no more of that folly, gentlemen," interrupted Rowley. "But no marvel we are turning into the green and yellow leaves of discourse: our punch-bowl is empty as an honest man's purse. Mine host, look to it."

"Punch for ever!" exclaimed Simon, bustling up. "I wonder if the water boiled last bowl—methought it smacked too much of the lemons." And he tottered out with the nectar-pot, as Wilmot called it.

"Come, come, Claude, murder or no murder, 'tis ten years agone," said Rowley, watching the melancholy, musing countenance of Duval. "And, as the rascal Scot says, let bygones be bygones; though, by-the-bye, they themselves never forgive. Cheer up, Jack! what avails looking so sad, man? Why art so down in the muzzle?"

"Faith, my lord, I have been in better spirits," replied Wilmot, with an absent smile. "My health fails, and, methinks, if what Dr. Lloyd warns me be true, I shall die a horrible death."

"Why, man, you are still in the summer of your days," said Rowley, cheerfully "'Tis time enough to repent when you can do no better; at worst, 'tis but turning Catholic and getting absolved. Besides, if you are damned, lad, 'tis in rare good company. What says old Shirley? since you have given us a slice of Anacreon."

He then began singing, or rather murmuring, the fine stanzas, which are recorded to have been his favourites, in the Contention of Ajax and Ulysses.

"The glories of our birth and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against fate:
Death lays his icy hands on kings:
Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down,

And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade."

"I would your grace had a better voice—you have a good will," said Wilmot, whose eyes were full of tears and wine. "Well, well, I shall not live very long to wish so, and when I die I shall go to the devil—eh, Blood?"

"An there be such a person, doubtless," replied the colonel, carelessly. "But hang it, here comes old Simon with the punch, so no more words, they interrupt drinking."

"And now," said Rowley, after a moment's pause in the conversation, "tell us, Blood, how dost thou prosper with that affair in the Tower thou wottest of?"

"My liege!" exclaimed the colonel, in an alarmed tone.

"How, thy liege? Am I the devil or the Duke of Monmouth?" said Rowley, sharply.

"Why, I do prosper mightily, sir," said Blood. "I have paid the old keeper sundry visits, and he is thoroughly persuaded that I am a most religious, puritanical, Baxterian divine. And I have broached a small matter how I will wed a son of his, a rough sea-captain, to a fair daughter of mine, that is rich by some grandmother's will."

"And doth the poor old man really take thee, with thy villanous countenance, for a man of decency and morals?" said Wilmot.

"Yea, and we do discourse godly matters, in the perfect style of the saints, so that it is a balm out of Gilead to hear us in spiritual communion," said Blood, in a hypocritical whine. "But how is this, my masters? Our punch-bowl dry again, and I have never lipped it!"

"Go, Simon, and mix us a little more of the pleasantness of lemons with the strength of brandy, and look that thou put less water, and yet that it be filled," said Rowley, with great solemnity.

"Ay, ay, more punch I warrant me—merry gallants, good troth," stammered the host feebly, and laughing with a tipsy silliness. "So—so I promise you I know my way. There is one of my eyes sober yet."

But honest Simon had scarcely moved from his chair ere he fell prone, punch-bowl and all. Rowley picked him up, but all efforts to sober him were in vain, and they were obliged to let him snore in his chair. They then rang a

bell on the table, and Mrs. Temperance entered, somewhat excited herself. She demurred, however, to the demand for more punch. "Ye have drunk enough, gallants," she said resolutely, "and I don't know how I'm to be paid. There's the colonel, here, owes me a three months' score, and I have never, as I'm a Christian woman, seen an angel of it."

"Nay, now, woman, what foolery's this?" said Blood; "would you shame me before my guests? Thou shalt be paid all in good time; and, meanwhile, dost thou not owe me a kiss, for slapping my cheek this morn till it blushed?'

And seizing the hostess by her shoulders and stout waist, Blood inflicted a very hearty salute. This seemed to mollify Mrs. Temperance, and calling him a "deceivous honey of a man," and her husband "an ugly little snoozling porker," she picked up the broken punch-bowl and made her exit.

"I pity thee, Blood," said Wilmot; "'tis a penance to wipe out half thy sins, having to kiss such lips for thy board."

"I would not for my life," added Rowley, groaning.

"Faith, your grace can afford to say so," replied the colonel, "seeing you have the pick of London's fairest ladies."

"Why, man, thou must be enviable by the King himself, favourite as he is among the fair English dames!" exclaimed Claude Duval, awaking from a long reverie, during which he sat contemplating Mervyn's countenance.

"Nay, come, I am not so much to be envied, an it were all known," muttered Rowley, in a discontented tone, "for what says old James Shirley? My father, that had not wit enough to keep his head on his shoulders, loved him well.

> "The glories of our birth and state
> Are shadows, not sub——"

"Gadskilly! what manner of chant is this for Alsatia?" exclaimed a new voice, and following Mrs. Temperance and the punch-bowl, entered an exceedingly handsome young man, wearing the uniform of the King's guard, but apparently disordered in some recent scuffle.

"Good now, gentlemen, excuse me," said Mrs. Temper-

ance. "Indeed, I cannot help it. This young gentleman comes roystering in, and understanding what good company ye were by the jingling of your glasses——"

"Oh, make no *pardonnez-mois*, good hostess," interrupted the young officer, "all rogues are brothers in Alsatia. I have just killed my man in Holborn, and ran here for shelter—where I know that virtue never lacks it—till my friends make the matter up."

"Thou killed thy man! surely thou hast begun early, my slashing blade!" exclaimed Rowley. "But no matter! As I said before, an the devil come he is welcome. Bring him a tankard, Mother Temperance—name but not thing; but that is the age's fashion."

"What had the man done to rouse thy wrath, thou sweet epitome of the times?" said Wilmot. "Had he trod on thy corn, or sworn that thou lackest beard, as, by my blue garter, thou dost most smockishly!"

"Nay, not so bad as that, or I had eaten him too," replied the young homicide; "he but called my mistress no better than she should be, and it was the truth too; but it suited not with mine honour to hear it said."

"And prithee what green girl hath thee in leading, for lack of a monkey?" said Wilmot.

"Oh, I can tell you she is none of your small fry," said the officer. "I know two great men that have shown a great deal of folly to win her smiles, and there is a third, a very great man indeed, who would give the world, an it were in his gift, to keep her faithfully his."

"Here's some new scandal of our virtuous court," said Rowley, winking at his companions. "What nobles are these that do affect thy Dulcinea? Are they of the rogues in, or the rogues out—court or country—speak!"

"Oh, they are notorious for being anything that hath a relish of villany in it," replied the fugitive. "To-day they are for the King and court, but what they may be to-morrow depends on the winds and weather. Yet men say they have good head-pieces, and they are reputed (though it may be falsely) to be the sons of two notorious profligates, my Lords of Buckingham and Rochester."

"Villain, thou liest!" exclaimed both Wilmot and Villiers, starting up and clapping their hands on their swords.

"Peace, gentlemen!" exclaimed Rowley, laughing

heartily. "And you, sir soldier, restrain your choleric valour, when I tell you that these worshipful squires are servants to those two great lords, and love them so well that they hold nothing dearer in earth or heaven."

"Oh, I thought by their look they could be nothing better," said the officer, contemptuously, and sheathing his half-drawn sword.

"Sit down, sir, and drink to the drowning of all unkindness," exclaimed Rowley. "Odds fish! he takes me sharp enough on the word! But prithee what great man do you speak of, and what is your lady's name, that we may drink her health in a bumper?"

"That is a secret everywhere but in our messroom," replied the young officer. "But I'll not drink your punch for nothing, for I'll teach you to reform your singing. Is that doleful ditty of Shirley's a song for Alsatia? And when there's so choice a novelty composed by that rogue, Sedley? Listen to it, and join chorus: 'tis very wicked and pleasant."

He then sang, in an extremely sweet but feminine voice, the following song:

THE JOLLY WHITE FRIARS

"We are all jolly friars—well met, brother rogue!
Though the name's out of fashion, the thing's much in vogue;
For stripp'd of the surplice, the robe, or the sword,
The devil can't tell a whipp'd thief from my lord;
And if truth may be sung, if 'twere not for the name,
My lady and Bess are extremely the same:
So, jolly White Friars, our toast shrink from never—
Here's success to all rogues—Wine and Women for ever!

"We are all jolly friars—ne'er blush, brother knave!
'Tis a title as common and old as the grave;
If the priest call you infidel, laugh in his face,
And ask him, what were he without his grimace.
If the soldier call coward, the lawyer cry thief,
Ask them both what they are without red coat or brief,
So, jolly White Friars, our toast will fail never—
Here's success to all rogues—Wine and Women for ever!"

"A very good song, and very well sung," said Rowley, eyeing the young officer with a ludicrous mixture of drunkenness and curiosity. "But, prithee, there's a sweet fellow of thine inches, do tell us what wench is this whom those two great lords affect. I'll never betray thee. Thou knowest

there is honour among thieves, and whoever trusts me trusts a rogue."

"Nay, youth, it were not consonant to the excellent honour of thy recent murther and future expectations to betray thy lady's confidence," said Villiers, eagerly.

"Nay, she told it not in confidence. All the town may know but her foolish Limberwell," replied the officer, laughing. "Look here—I show it in all companies—'tis a present she made me this morning, laughing very heartily at the fond Solomon who gave it her scarce an hour before." And he threw down a diamond armlet of exquisite workmanship and brilliancy.

"A present to thee!" exclaimed Rowley, snatching at it fiercely. "Why, thou girl-faced popinjay, thou liest worse than the Black One. A present to thee! Rogue, thou hast stolen it."

"Stolen it! I scorn the word," replied the officer, contemptuously. "And but that I see you are mildewed with liquor—why, I tell you, man, 'twas Mistress Gwyn that gave it me, swearing she would never have parted with it but to a fellow of my infinite merit."

"What, Nell Gwyn—Nelly Gwyn!" exclaimed Rowley, stuttering with rage. "Why, then, I say, odd's life, I'll never stand it. Give me the bracelet, boy, and I'll see thee hung yet an I be not myself."

"Only with my life will I surrender it," retorted the youth, putting the bracelet into his bosom, and cocking his hat fiercely.

"Why, then, with thy life," returned Rowley, making a successful catch. "And now, an thou wouldst win it back, out with thy rapier. I'll not show the white feather so soon as the chicken thou hast killed by surprise."

"Marry, I'm tired of killing for this sunset," said the officer, carelessly. "But now you know the lady's name, gentlemen, you surely have not the confidence to deny what I have asserted of you—of you, false nobles—for you are not disguised so much by these beggar's clothes as ye are in your earl's mantles."

"I will not brook so base a libel in this presence," exclaimed Villiers, springing up and drawing his sword.

"'Tis a scandal on human nature," said Wilmot, drawing his blade simultaneously.

"Fie on you, gentlemen, the odds are not fair, and I'll

stand on the youth's side," said Claude, flashing his sword out, and waving it in a graceful flourish.

"And I'll throw this bottle at anybody's head that touches him," exclaimed Mervyn, seizing a decanter, and blushing scarlet with indignation.

"Faith, brothers, thanking ye, I need no aid," said the officer, with perfect *sang-froid*. "I'll make mincemeat of him who stirs for or against me—skewer ye on my sword, like kidneys. Zounds, sirs, do you think I am to be bullied by a parcel of poor knaves in a Ram Alley tavern?"

"Why, what proof canst thou allege, rogue! that we—that I, Buckingham, could ever so betray my royal master?" exclaimed Villiers.

"Or that I?" shouted Wilmot.

"Why, since you challenge me to the proof, my lords, here is one not easily refuted," said the seeming officer, laughing, and, taking off his hat, he shook a shower of rich golden ringlets over his beautiful face. "Ye may stare, sweet gentlemen, but methinks I should be able to report the truth concerning Nell Gwyn's sweethearts, eh?"

"Why, Nell, Nell, 'slife! what manner of wild prank is this?" exclaimed Rowley, dropping his sword.

"Why, Charles, Charles, what manner of wild prank is this?" returned the eccentric beauty. "Are you turned squire of Alsatia? Is this a proper place for the Majesty of England to harbour in? Shame on ye, lords, to bring your King to these roguish haunts of yours, and peril the safety of England on the point of some rude taverner's sword."

"Nell, Nell, thou art the indiscreetest creature!" ejaculated the King, catching her in his arms. "And the sweetest officer! But, Nell, these rattlesome pranks of thine will undo thee some day."

"*Est-il possible?* are you the King, Mr. Rowley?" exclaimed Claude. "But King or cobbler, you are a hearty good fellow, and that's better. Sweet Mistress Nell, I do commend me, as a sometime acquaintance, to your recollection."

"And, Claude, thou art a good fellow, too, in thy way," said the King, rising with dignity. "But for all that, if I catch thee in my sheriff's clutches, thou shalt as certainly swing for it as the sun sets that day."

"And, Charles, thou art a better fellow than nine-tenths

of the rogues that wear crowns," replied Claude, who was much intoxicated; "but if I catch thee alone, and ease thee not of thy purse, the sun shall never rise that morrow."

"It were scarce worth the pains," said Charles.

"But, sweet Mistress Nell, beseech you," said Wilmot, in his most blandishing tone, "you do not mean to accuse us to his Majesty of such treason?"

"Yea, and half the men of the court," replied Nell, with a roguish look, which made both the nobles smile and colour too. "But the best of ye got but a tart speech, or, it may be, the tag-end of an old song for your pains—

> "Nay, never blush, brother knave!
> 'Tis a title as common and old as the grave."

"Tut, sirs, I forgive ye—ye are men like the rest," interrupted Charles. "But it is full time we were wagging. Nell, thou hast brought me back to my senses. Here's mine arm, thou spruce little soldier; hast any conveyance at hand?"

"My barge waits at the stairs below, and the men will know none of us in these disguises," replied Nell; "so let us to Whitehall with all diligence! 'Tis a bet between me and my Lady Castlemaine, and I have won it."

"Come with us, lords," said Charles, smiling. "Farewell, Duval; rob only rogues, and the whole human race are thy bankers. Blood, look to thy nephew—see how heavy sleep hangs on his fine eyes; and bring him with thee to court, when thou art sufficiently out of trouble to come there thyself."

These words broke up the disorderly revelry. The king, his courtiers, and Nell Gwyn took their way down the Friary to embark for Whitehall; and mine host being roused, was with difficulty made to understand that he was to prepare a bed for the young kid, as he called him. A truckle-bed, in a garret destitute of all other furniture save rats, two or three old saddles, and some bundles of hay, was then prepared for Mervyn; but miserable as was the accommodation, he was so exhausted with fatigue and drink, that he dropped asleep the instant he lay down upon it.

Blood and Duval prolonged their festival to a later hour; Mrs. Temperance was snoring on the stairs, and old Simon

himself literally *fell* asleep with a lighted candle in his hand on the threshold of Mervyn's garret. Luckily, it was extinguished in the fall, and the night passed with marvellous tranquillity—considering.

CHAPTER XX

THE UNNATURAL MOTHER

Late on the following morning, Mervyn was awakened by the entrance of some person into his garret, and, starting up, he saw, with dazzled eyes, a figure which he at first mistook for a Jew. It was clothed in a long mantle of green baize, with a slouching Spanish hat, and had a short, grizzly beard, though the eyebrows were unnaturally black. A sort of pedlar's pack was slung on his back, containing a few articles such as the Jews were wont to hawk about the streets.

"Get up, boy," he said, in a tone which Mervyn instantly recognised. "It is late, and good luck is waiting for you. I intend to introduce you to a most noble lady, a friend of mine, who may, perchance, put you in a way of advancement."

"Colonel Blood!" exclaimed Mervyn, with an involuntary shudder.

"Thou marvellest to see me thus guised?" said the colonel. "The truth is, I dare not step out of the Sanctuary without some precautions. But make no delay; dress thyself, and join me suddenly in the room below, where I am breakfasting."

Mervyn obeyed, though with a reluctance which increased with every reflection that he made as he proceeded. The events of the previous night swam in his memory like a dream, and for some moments he could scarcely think it otherwise, so improbable did it appear to him that the King and nobles of so great a country as England could thus degrade their dignity.

Blood, however, allowed him but little time to reflect on his situation. He shouted to him to come down in a harsh voice, which he dared not disobey. He found a sub-

stantial breakfast, which they partook of in almost total silence, and then Blood made preparations for a sortie. Mervyn watched his toilet with some curiosity. He put on a wig which fell in long matted locks on his shoulders, and muffled up his jaws with an old shawl, so that little was visible but his fierce eyes. Then, after a morning draught with little Simon, they took their way down Water Lane. The colonel took a boat at the stairs, and, giving the men directions where to go, stretched himself lazily at the prow, while Mervyn sat silently watching the brilliant play of the sun on the waters.

Aumerle House was the place named by Blood, which, as he had heard the name before under peculiar circumstances, rather excited Mervyn's attention. They landed at Westminster Stairs, whence Blood, keeping a sharp look out on his young companion, turned down a series of streets and gardens—perhaps with a view to bewilder him—and emerged, at length, before a lordly mansion, whose gardens descended to the river. It was of an antique style of architecture, rich and elaborate, like that which distinguished the era of Henry VII., and was environed with all the appurtenances of the highest rank and luxury. Embroidered porters opened the gate, and a crowd of menials appeared in the hall beyond, gaming, or playing on musical instruments, apparently for their own amusement.

Mervyn was surprised at the ease with which they obtained admittance to this palace, Blood merely muttering a few cabalistical words to the porter, as they passed into the hall. A nimble page instantly darted before them, to announce their approach, and they followed, in silence, through a series of antique but very magnificent apartments. They paused at length at the entrance of an apartment defended by a large gilded screen, where the page motioned them to wait his return. Blood amused himself, in the meantime, by peeping between the chinks of the screen—an example which Mervyn followed. He perceived a room of great extent, the walls of which were of dark oak, elaborately carved, and broken into deep recesses of emblazoned windows. At the farther end was a projecting fireplace, also most richly carved in oak, in which was a bright fire in a silver grate, moulded to represent a dragon. Beside this, in a huge velvet chair sat a

lady embroidering lace in a frame. Little of her countenance could be discerned, but Mervyn saw that she was pale. Her dress was extremely rich, consisting of black velvet, laced in gold to the knee ; and, from the flash of the fire-light occasionally, he thought she wore many and rich jewels. Mervyn watched the page as he reverently approached, and saw that the lady started at the name he pronounced, and turning suddenly, he beheld a countenance of great beauty, but deeply careworn, and remarkable for the gloom and hauteur of its expression. The page returned instantly, with a message that the Lady Howard desired Master Isaac to approach with his Eastern drug, which he said was so excellent to cause sleep. Desiring Mervyn to tarry with the pack, Blood stepped feebly forward, leaving the youth in his distant station behind the screen.

At first Blood feigned to move up the chamber with the slow step and decrepit bend natural to the age he assumed, but when out of earshot he suddenly resumed his bold stride, and approached the lady without any of those reverential observances which her high rank seemed to demand. It appeared as if she noticed this, for she waved her hand impatiently, and said, " Friend Isaac, methinks if we have any observers thou art near enough for thine assumed office. Prithee, what new mystery is this ? What drug hath thy pernicious hand gathered to lay balm on a bleeding conscience ? "

" I come, madam," replied the pretended Jew, " to crave some small supply from your generosity, to baffle for a time the fangs of famine which are ready to seize on me."

" I have told you already, Mr. Blood, you have exhausted both my compassion and the means of gratifying it," replied the lady. " You know well whether or not I have repaid the—the service which it was my direful misfortune to need at your hands ; and you are but too well aware that my Lord Howard's extravagances leave me but little even for mine own urgent wants and the maintenance of his great household. I cannot supply the extravagance of all the mad profligates in London. I presume, Mr. Blood, you will next command me to give bail before the Parliament on your notable cause with his Grace of Ormonde ? "

" Methinks my services might demand even that recom-

pense, madam," replied the colonel, resolutely. "Who is it that hath given you the happiness and freedom of your present life, this gorgeous palace, these ample revenues, the man you love? Where were you now but for one bold hand and unflinching heart? In brief, lady, I must have money, and you cannot in gratitude, you dare not in policy, refuse me. What I need is a mere trifle to preserve an old friend from starvation—absolute starvation."

"Why, two pieces of copper a day might do that," replied the lady, bitterly. "But I know you too well, Blood, to think that you limit your demands to an anchorite's prayer. You are a man of spirit, lead a gay life, have your quality intrigues! But, sir, I tell you I will no longer be the slave of your menaces. Do your worst!—what can you do?"

"What can I do?" repeated Blood, with a dark smile. "I will answer you, lady. I can, with a breath, a word, precipitate you from wealth, magnificence, honour, and love—into poverty, shame, detestation! The heir of Aumerle—the rightful heir—lives, and I have it in my power to restore him to all his rights."

"Thou liest, unearthly villain, thou liest!" exclaimed the countess, turning deadly pale. "The heir of Aumerle was drowned—burned—whelmed at once by fire and water! You yourself, monster, assured me of this, with all the pledges that could bind even the fiend to truth."

"And so I thought myself at the time, lady," said the colonel, calmly. "But I was deceived. It was an ancient and good maxim of the Cardinal Richelieu, never to believe his enemy dead till he saw his carcase. Who ever found the body of the young Reginald? No, lady, I warn you. The waves and fire have given up their prey, and, in the saints' language, he may perchance prove—the avenger of blood!"

"Methinks that were small advantage to you, colonel," said Lady Howard, with a spasmodic smile.

"And still less to you, madam, for you have more to lose," answered Blood. "And, surely, the hand that sharpens the knife is as guilty as that which plunges it."

"I have been but too much accustomed to this language from your mouth to resent it," said the countess. "But who, let me ask you, Mr. Blood, would listen to such an

accusation from such a tongue? But, you say, the heir of Aumerle lives. Let us see this heir—where is he?"

"Speak low, madam, or he will hear you," said Blood, calmly. "He is here, in this house, in this hall of his ancestors—a stranger!"

"What mean you, audacious man?" exclaimed Lady Howard, with a quivering spasm of her whole frame.

"Be not alarmed, lady," said Blood; "as yet he knows nothing of his birth, nor of the events which have made him a wretched foundling, depending on charity for life and bread."

"A pleasantly imagined romance, Master Colonel," said the countess, with a laugh in which there was no mirth. "But think not to make me the fool of a sorry imposture. I can produce against your new testimony that which you gave at the trial of Claude Duval—that you saw *him* perish—for which testimony you received two thousand pounds from my hand."

"A pleasant document, methinks, to be produced in a court of justice by a mother! But I have writings which, without implicating myself, would overthrow all your defences. In brief, Claude Duval saved the child, and transferred it safely to St. Omer, though, to baffle our bloodhound scent, he stated at his trial that it perished on the night of the great fire. And, briefly, I have inveigled the youth into my power, to be used as I please, or rather, madam, as you determine."

"I see it all; 'tis a base forgery, coined to extort money," said the countess, vehemently. "But think not, Blood, think not any longer to play upon the strings of terror in my woman's heart; you have worn them out. God help me! I do scarce care if you accomplish the worst your hate can threaten—which methinks I suffer in the fearing."

"Force me not to that pass, Lady Howard, or it will be ill for both," said the colonel. "You forget that I am a man of sudden resolves, and though I sold you the jewels and precious documents found in Duval's cloak, I reserved certain papers for mine own use."

"Villain!—but 'tis all the coinage of thy false heart!" exclaimed the countess, passionately.

"Nay, then, you shall not doubt it; you shall see him," said Blood. "Ho there—Ichabod!"

"One moment, Blood, one moment!" ejaculated the lady, turning perfectly white. "Is he—is he—like *him*?"

"The late earl—judge for yourself," replied the colonel. "Ichabod!"

Mervyn emerged from behind the screen, and advanced with the timidity and hesitation natural to one so unaccustomed to the world, his fine complexion mantling with a deep blush. The countess collected herself by a strong effort, and though she was still deadly pale, her eyes were fixed upon him with a wild intensity which increased his confusion. What thoughts were passing in her mind! what a confusion of recollections! what vivid contrasts of what *was* with what *might have been*, as Mervyn, her disowned and only child, stood before her! Even Blood grew somewhat alarmed at the length and fixedness of this scrutiny, but he was too perfect a master of dissimulation to suffer any emotion to be visible. "Madam," he said, after a moment's pause, "here is the young orphan of whom I spoke."

"Pray you, good youth," said the countess, hurriedly, "stand forward in the light."

"What ails you, madam?" said Blood; for as the light fell on Mervyn's face, the countess uttered a loud exclamation of surprise.

"Nothing—nothing!" said the lady, shutting her eyes with a strong shudder. "Blood, are you man or devil, to gaze unblenchingly on that face?" she added, in a stifled whisper.

"A comely youth, indeed, as you say, my lady," replied the colonel, in an unaltered tone. "Indeed, there are not lacking men who say that he something resembles your own illustrious family of Aumerle."

"What is your name, youth, and of what lineage?" said the countess, after a pause.

"My name is Mervyn, madam," replied the youth, in a voice which thrilled through the countess's nerves.

"Mervyn! ay, but your Christian name; surely you have two names?" she said, hastily.

"I never heard myself called aught but Mervyn, yet Colonel Blood says my name is Ichabod."

"What! have you no father, child?" said the countess, leaning forward, and gazing in his face as if she could read into his very soul.

"I had neither father nor mother, ever to know them," he murmured, with the same lingering sadness of tone.

"Nor mother!" repeated Lady Howard, with a glance at Blood. "Nor mother! You hear him, Blood, and my heart does not break," continued the countess, in a low tone; "prithee, let him go, ere it swell too full of anguish, and burst my breast."

"Mervyn," said the colonel, gently, "the noble lady likes you, and may hereafter do something for you. Now kiss her ladyship's hand and retire."

"No, no, I cannot, I may not!" exclaimed the countess, starting from her chair as if at the approach of a serpent. "On your life, touch me not, boy. I mean," she added, with an hysteric laugh—"I am afraid, for they say the malign spotted fever is still rife in that unwholesome district whence you come; not that I fear it—not that I fear it!"

And she laughed long and wildly until, sinking exhaustedly into her chair, a shower of tears came to her relief.

"Retire, Mervyn; my Lady Howard is subject to these fits," said the unrelenting colonel, "especially when she sees a youth of your figure; for many years ago she lost a son, who, had he lived, would have been much of thy inches."

Mervyn bowed humbly to the lady, and resumed his distant station behind the screen.

"Well, madam, are you convinced?" said Blood, as the boy disappeared, "or must I bring those written proofs in play which will surely reinstate him in all that should rightfully be his?"

"Is this, then, the drug to restore me the calm sleep whereof your too ready villany deprived me for ever?" said Lady Howard, passionately.

"They who dice with fate, lady, must stand the hazard of the throw," replied he, significantly. "But take not on so sadly; all may be well again if you but will it."

"Speak—what would you? I am the slave of your spell," said the countess, in a tone of deep despair.

"Lady Howard," replied the colonel, apparently somewhat moved by her emotion, "beautiful lady! for whom I have perilled soul and body, lured by what magic I dare

not now remind you! nothing but my extreme necessity should force me to use this engine against you."

"Well, what do you need, sir?" said the countess, in the same tranquil tone of despair. "Cost what it will, I must conceal that horrid bygone from Howard; I cannot afford to lose the only heart that loves me."

"Five hundred guineas will deliver you for ever from my importunities," replied Blood.

"Five hundred guineas! Well, it is but gold," ejaculated the lady. "And yet Howard but now craved a smaller sum of me in vain. But wilt thou swear to me (for I have known thee true to thy oath, through perils which would have dashed to pieces the faith of honester men)—wilt thou swear never to trouble me more on this account?"

Blood uttered an asseveration which made even Lady Howard shudder. She then drew her chair to the table, where there was a silver standish, and began writing, while Blood continued to gaze on her beautiful countenance, which, flushed as it was with violent emotion, was still indescribably lovely. Suddenly, however, she paused, and seemed lost in reverie; then, raising her eyes to his, with an expression so emphatic that it needed not words to make her meaning apparent, she murmured in a hollow, unearthly tone, "Understand me without speech. Wouldst thou for twice, for thrice this sum *rid me of this care—for ever?*"

As Blood stared in astonishment at her words, she divined the meaning of his looks, and continued, "Nay, not that—Heaven forbid," said the countess, hurriedly, and relapsing into deadly whiteness. "But there are other means—the plantations. Oh, Blood, Blood, you know not to what madness I am driven. And it is too late to repent—too late. What if this boy be the destined avenger of his father's——"

"Suicide?" said Blood, calmly filling the pause. "But no, it is impossible. He knows nothing of his birth, suspects nothing. Trouble yourself no more about him; he shall never even dream what may offend you. Henceforth your troubles with both of us are over—and I kiss your fair hand on my oath." And saying this, the colonel gallantly raised her hand to his lips, and pressing it with a little Irish warmth, she withdrew it abruptly, and with displeasure visible in the dark flash of her eye. He affected

not to notice this, but quietly examined the paper, and muttering that he should have preferred gold, bowed to the lady's impatient wave, and moved a few steps as if to retire. He returned, however, so suddenly that the countess started.

"You are alarmed, madam," he said in a deep, warning tone. "But keep your faith with me, and you have no cause. Attempt not the life of this orphan, for if you do, I shall know that my own is in jeopardy. So long as his person remains uninjured, I will never cross this threshold without your permission; but the instant *that* is attempted I will hunt, harass, let myself loose upon you! So look to it." Saying this, he passed into the antechamber; motioned Mervyn to follow him, and passed into the street, attended by his young victim.

CHAPTER XXI

THE POPISH PLOT

The colonel and Mervyn now directed their steps westward, and were turning into the Mall, when they met Oates in full canonicals. The two worthies greeted each other with infinite glee; and Jew as he seemed, the worthy doctor did not disdain to take Blood's arm, and parade himself along,—to the great admiration of the passers, who ascribed it to Christian humility, or concluded he was making a convert.

Mervyn followed his benevolent master with the seemingly voluntary steps of a man walking to execution, because he knows that he cannot resist. They now proceeded to a money-changer, who, for the convenience of the profligate court and of his own, dwelt at the sign of the Brass Balls, in St. Martin's Lane, where Mervyn saw them present a piece of paper, and receive in return a heavy bag of gold, which was divided between them by the two dignitaries. From the money-changer's they returned down Whitehall to the Mall, and continued talking, in a low but deeply-interested tone. Mervyn understood but little of what they said; but he heard Blood inquire if the yeast were

working; to which question Oates replied that Kirby, the chemist, had broken the matter to the King, who affected to make light of it altogether; but that Dr. Tongue intended to renew the subject on his Majesty's morning walk, which he usually attended to receive commands about the royal laboratory.

As the two friends discussed this subject, they entered the Mall, where, from the number of glittering cavaliers and masked ladies abroad, they concluded that the King had made his appearance. They took a station under a mulberry-tree, where some persons were congregated round a woman singing ballads, and shortly after Mervyn saw a group of some twenty gentlemen, very richly dressed, and all bareheaded, approaching rapidly down the Mall. Among these he readily distinguished the tall, swarthy figure of the King, who wore his hat and a jewelled tuft of feathers. He seemed walking, or rather striding, at a rate which had evidently put some of the courtiers out of breath, and he looked vexed, which might readily be accounted for, as Dr. Tongue was by his side, talking away with great earnestness.

The royal group approached, and as the King passed without observing them, Blood stepped boldly forward, and bowing in an oriental style, exclaimed, "*Vivat Rex!*"

"A Polish Jew?" said Charles, pausing, and looking at him with curiosity. "Well, *Vivat Judæus*! But, friend, it seems if divers of my well-wishers have their own way, you will soon cry '*Vivat*' to tickle a pair of longer ears. In brief, Tongue," he continued, turning to the divine, "the sum of your discourse is—there is a plot afoot by that exceedingly happy and highly-tolerated people, the Catholics, to make a vacancy by cutting my throat, and to set my brother on the throne. There is a general revolt, and I know not how many invasions, planned by Jesuits and others, who shall be nameless. Now all this is enough to frighten me out of my appetite, which I take not kindly of a man who understands chemistry, and it is altogether too great a matter to be discussed before dinner."

"Please your Majesty——," began Dr. Tongue, when the king interrupted him.

"Zounds, man alive, understand us—you are imposed on!" he exclaimed. "And I have no time to waste on any man's follies but my own."

"In God's name, sire, let us sift this pretended plot to

the bottom," said the Duke of Buckingham, who was of the train. "We may chance to find some pearls among the chafings of an oyster. Moreover, it would do your Majesty incalculable advantage to have it believed that the Papists are in conspiracy against your life, as my Lord Danby seems to think by his sweet smile."

"And pending such dangerous conspiracies and horrible massacring plots, my liege," said the Earl of Danby, with his crafty smile, "the maddest parliament on earth cannot refuse your Majesty supplies for our present military power, and perchance an increase instead of a disbanding, seeing we have two such potent enemies to fight against as the Pope and the devil."

"Excellently good, gentlemen," said Charles, seating himself in a rustic chair under the mulberry-tree. "But it is dangerous sport setting one's neighbour's house on fire to warm one's own. But 'slife! Master Tongue, we are something fevered with this morning's hot tennis work; and how comes it, Rochester, you look so like your own ghost?"

"I was at my devotions so late last night, sire," replied the nobleman, whose complexion was, indeed, ashy pale, "for I am papistical enough to be a jolly friar."

"So, then, your Majesty will run the gauntlet of these shocking, execrable, popish conspiracies?" exclaimed Dr. Tongue. "Yea, be as it were the target for a thousand arrows shot from invisible bows, but all aimed at your sacred life, and honour, and dominion."

"Faith, no! I had rather reign, like John Lackland, with my crown at the Pope's footstool—Antichrist as you call his reverence in your opiate sermons, Tongue," replied Charles, glancing with a smile among his courtiers, who had formed a half-circle round his chair. "Why, man, I nothing doubt thy very natural wish to be a dean, but—a word to the wise—this is not the way to make thee one. I have not so much leisure as to waste it on every cock-and-bull story a parson may chance to hear in a fit of the muddles."

"Nay, but, sire, do but hear the plain straightforward narrative of that godly man and zealous lover of your Majesty's service, Dr. Titus Oates," said Tongue, with extreme earnestness.

"Indeed, my liege, it will please neither parliament nor

rabble if we seem too remiss in making at least inquiry into the truth of these horrible statements," said Lord Danby.

"It will not do, Danby," replied the King, looking at him with a significant smile. "If you raise the devil you will be like the magician's foolish scholar, and, not being able to find him work enough, he will tear his summoner to pieces."

"We may, at least, without danger, examine this alleged witness before the council, and set men's minds at rest," said Danby. "I am told my Lord Shaftesbury intends to badger me about it to-night. Where might a messenger find this Oates, Tongue?"

"Not far from this spot, my lord," said the divine, "for, in good faith, methinks I see him in that throng to the left, and will, if it please you, call him. Dr. Oates!"

"Heor! ready to obey the call of the Loard and the trumpet of Gideon," exclaimed the reverend personage thus addressed, stepping boldly forth.

"He hath a villanous mien," said Charles, in a low voice to Danby. "And, moreover—hear ye not?—his voice hath the saints' twang. Can good come out of Nazareth?—And so, reverend sir, your name is Oaths?"

"Oates, an't please your Majesty," replied the doctor. "The Loard be praised for that and all other His goodness."

"And your mother, too, ungrateful prodigal!" said Charles, reproachfully. "But 'tis well you thank Heaven, though you have so little cause. And you are the gentleman professing to have discovered all these wondrous secrets, by living among the Jesuits, and aiding and abetting in all their conspiracies, and plans, and plots, for the overthrow of the reformed religion, and a massacre of nine millions of innocent Protestants by some sixty bloodthirsty Papists?"

"I did live among them, sire, but as David among the Canaanites," replied Oates, raising his eyes and pressing his heart. "But God and His holy angels know that I never changed my religion, but went among them for the sole purpose of betraying them."

"Why, then, man, you are a black villain, a cursed Judas. But think not I will offer the thirty pieces of silver for innocent blood," said Charles, sternly. "Come, gentlemen, we will hear no more from such a perjurous

rascal. Tongue, I never thought thee otherwise than an ass, but this demonstrates thee one as clearly as any formula of algebra."

"But, my liege, the populace will not be thus satisfied," said Danby. "We must not seem to stifle this matter. It should be solemnly investigated, and perhaps we may find at the bottom what will serve your Majesty's interests. The council sits this evening, and if you have any proofs that will stand sifting, produce them there."

"And if, my loard, I do not prove a most monstrous black conspiracy, a Jesuitical, abominable, popish——" began Oates, with unabated effrontery.

"Peace! we have had enough of this holy Billingsgate," interrupted Charles. "Danby, if you will play with hot irons, marvel not if you burn your fingers; but I'll have nothing to do with it. Come, my lords, we will on, and leave this reverend man to hatch his crocodile's eggs without the sun of our favour."

The king rose and moved sharply forward, followed by the whole court, and Brother Titus was left alone, excepting a few of the rabble, who continued gazing at him from a distance, and whispering. After a moment's consideration, Oates turned aside, and rejoined the Polish Jew.

"Courage, brother; never pucker thy ugly face to frighten the devil," exclaimed Blood. "I see thou hast not found such a brilliant reception as thy virtues entitle thee to; they do not know thee as yet. We shall see the day when the scarlet lady herself will shake on her seven hills to hear thy name."

"Nay, 'tis a fair enough beginning; the acorn grows to an oak at last," said Oates, wiping his brow. "I only want to set the matter afloat on men's talk; and now I am going straight as a witch's wand before Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, lest the court suddenly stoifle me and the ploat together."

Blood highly commended this notion, but as he was not desirous of sharing the public attention, he agreed with Oates to follow at a distance. The small knot of rabble had by this time increased to a considerable crowd, and as soon as the doctor moved they began to follow, though without distinctly comprehending why or whither. But a London mob is inexhaustible in curiosity, and not to be deterred by any trouble or peril in gratifying it. Blood and

Mervyn, whose curiosity was also strongly excited, mingled with the mob, and succeeded in squeezing their way into the justice-room.

Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, whose name was doomed to carry so tragical a sound in the ear of posterity, was one of the most popular magistrates of the day, and the only one whose suspected leanings to popery were pardoned by the mob, in consideration of the extreme severity with which he administered the laws against papists. He was a man of singular habits, but of great courage and unsuspected integrity. He, almost alone of the magistracy, during the panic caused by the great plague, remained in the diseased city, and by his vigorous severity kept order in his vast and desperate district. He was knighted by Charles for these services, and, though a man of a harsh and melancholy disposition, continued a favourite of the populace through all the changes of that eventful period, by the same inflexible qualities which had first won him their admiration.

Sir Edmundbury was a remarkable looking man, and bore traces of his character imprinted on his whole appearance. He was tall, dark, and hard-featured, but his height was diminished by a constant stoop, and there was something severe and sad in his down-drawn lips and knit brow. He was attired with studied plainness, and wore a broad hat with a gold band, the large flaps of which added a darker shade to his austere countenance. His hair was long, lank, and iron-grey, and on this occasion there was a troubled expression in his sunk grey eyes, as if in presage of the dreadful fate which awaited him.

"What-a-mercy! what manner of hubbub is this, officers?" said the magistrate, glancing at the rabble which tumultuously flooded the bar. "What do ye want, my masters? Let the broken heads speak first. Fie! a rioter in canonicals!"

"Your worship, neither I nor these worthy brothers in Christ are such," replied Oates, loudly. "I am come to make a deposition before your worship and God Almighty, concerning a dreadful plot of the paupishers, which it hath been His pleasure I should be the earthly instrument of discovering."

"Methinks a man of your reverend garb should have put that great name first," said Godfrey, slightly raising his hat at the word. "But as you please. Yet I had rather

you took the affair before some other justice, as you know what the vulgar say—that I favour papists on account of some kindness rendered me by his royal highness—though it is false."

"For that self-same reason that your impartiality cannot be questioned, I have selected you from all the magistrates of this great sinful Sodom and Gomorrah," replied Oates. "And I call upon you by the oath you have taken to administer the King's justice, to take my affidavit anent this horrible ploat of the Jesuits to overthrow the Church of God, and introduce Arbitrary Power and the Inquisition in this hitherto free and gospel land."

"I do not refuse; I have not the power to refuse," replied the justice. "But I would advise you to weigh well your words before you give them forth; for the beginning of contention is like letting out of waters, and no man knows whither they may go."

"Here then is my written deposition, my testimony against unbelieving Ahab," said Oates, triumphantly producing a sealed paper. "I am ready to make oath to the truth of all the charges herein contained, worshipful sir, and my strength coming from above, will prove them before the parliament and people of England. I have been in the camp of the enemy, and have brought such news as, like a peal of thunder, shall rouse Israel, sleeping on his arms."

"What mean you, sir? in what camp?" replied Sir Edmundbury. "Am I to understand that you have spied out some armed force in the heart of this kingdom, and come to aver the same by oath?"

"Yea, verily," said the unabashed Oates, "I *have* spied out an enemy in the heart of the land—one which has already posted himself in our citadels and high places, and bribed our watchers on the hills; an enemy, not armed in steel, but in falsehood; not wielding spears, but ploats; not wearing the sword nor the helmet, but the dagger and the mask:—the Jesuits! the Jesuits! I have dwelt long enough in their camp to learn all their monstrous treasonable ploats, and I have now shaken the dust from my sandals, as a testimony against them for ever."

"And this sealed paper contains your depositions or accusations?" said Sir Edmundbury, silencing the murmurs of the rabble with a look. "It will not do, sir. I will not

suffer you to make oath on its contents unless I know them. Nought shall be done in so weighty a matter darkly. And yet methinks it were fitter you took your papers and yourself before the council or my Lord Chancellor, who are, from their dignity, more suitable magistrates to investigate a charge of such high moment, involving the safety of the state."

"Your worship then refuses to take my affidavit?" said Oates, and the mob raised a clamour which was deepened by Blood's stentorian voice shouting afterwards what became the war-cry of his party, "No Popery! No Popery!"

This yell was instantly echoed in every variety of dissonant voice, and Sir Edmundbury turning sharply round, called out, "Constables, seize these brayers, and off to Bridewell with them, for rioting in court, in contempt of his Majesty's justice." This threat, and the known severity of the man, produced instant silence.

"I do not refuse, Dr. Oates, since that is your name, to take your deposition, or any other man's," said the justice; "but I will not suffer myself to be used as a blind instrument. Read your deposition, and take as many oaths to it as you like."

Oates asked nothing better than to thus throw upon Sir Edmundbury the blame of divulging his narrative before the council had examined it. He read, in his loud coarse tones, amidst the most eager silence of all present, the outlines of that terrible plot which was destined to shed so much blood ere it coiled itself up in peace.

The groundwork of this plot was the supposed and implicitly credited fact that the Catholic Church was engaged in a strenuous effort to crush the great northern heresy. This no doubt was true, and the same might be affirmed in general of all subsequent times, and certainly with much more emphasis in that age, which beheld the Reformation extirpated in the south of Europe, and gradually narrowing in the north. The chief ministers and propagandists of the Roman Church in working these wonders were undoubtedly the Jesuits, the most prudent, subtle, ambitious, and successful of all the great societies forming the armies of Catholicism throughout the globe. The English people of the seventeenth century, educated in the narrowest and fiercest fanaticism, considered this society as little better than a direct emanation from the

devil, and its members were endowed in the popular imagination with little less power and inclination to do evil, than the fiends who surround the throne of Beelzebub himself. The vulgar hatred represented them as the cause of all the evils which befell the nation at home and abroad. It was the Jesuits who turned the swords of Catholic Spain and France against the great bulwark of heresy; the Jesuits who destroyed London by fire, and devastated its population with the plague; the Jesuits who caused the perpetual quarrels arising between Charles and his subjects;—for it was tacitly understood by the masses that their king, his brother, and the court, were engaged heart and soul in the stupendous project of the re-establishment of popery.

It was on these foregone conclusions, already silently grounded in the national mind, that Oates built his wild and incongruous structure, which, cemented as it was with blood and terror, finally fell by its own weight, leaving a ghastly ruin to warn the future, if nations ever gathered wisdom from experience.

To accomplish their grand plan, the Jesuits, according to Oates, found it necessary to destroy all the barriers of English liberty and pave their way with the ruins of the boasted English constitution. But it seemed they suspected that the King's waywardness and epicurean indifference made him an unfit instrument of their designs, and it was determined to get rid of him, and to substitute the Duke of York, who was allowed to be a papist to the backbone. To effect this object, Oates accused Father La Chaise, the French King's confessor, or Le Shee as he called him, of having lodged two thousand pounds in the hands of a London goldsmith, to bribe a murderer; Oliva, and the Spanish Jesuits, he added, granted the same sum; the Benedictines, being poor, merely subscribed their prayers.

There was to be a rising in Ireland, a grand massacre of the Protestants there, and the French were to assist with a large army. In England, the Duke of York was to dissolve the parliament, and assume all the powers of government in his own hands, France and Spain assisting with arms and money. The great facility with which the nation changed its religion at the bland persuasions of axe and faggot, under Mary, was to form the model and encouragement of the Jesuits in their grand labour, and the same

potent argument was to be employed in converting England again to the faith.

Oates further deposed that a general consultation of the Jesuits was held in May, 1678, in London, at the White Horse Tavern, which divided itself into five or six minor sections, in as many apartments, all debating on the best means to murder the King and bring about the other desirable results. According to the testimony of the reverend witness, he—though suspected, and even personally maltreated by the provincial of the English Jesuits, Van Huysman—was employed to carry tickets of resolves from company to company. But he declined to state, in his affidavit, what these resolves were. He declared, however, that Sir George Wakeman, the Queen's physician, was to have fifteen thousand pounds for poisoning the King, a sum which he had received in part, and that Coleman, the Duchess of York's secretary, was in treasonable correspondence with France. Oates also intimated that the fire of London was caused by the Jesuits, for the sake of plunder and to promote confusion. He affirmed that the Pope had in grand consistory decided that the realm of England was forfeit to him as heretical: and though he certainly intended to make the Duke of York a sort of crowned viceroy, his holiness had exercised his sovereignty by appointing a vast number of lay officers, among whom Oates had carefully included some of the principal Catholic noblemen and gentry.

Sir Edmundbury's surprise and even terror increased with every word of this extraordinary deposition, but his rigid countenance showed no emotion whatever, while the groans and exclamations of the auditors evinced the intensity of theirs. Blood himself was amazed and somewhat alarmed at the multiplicity and magnitude of the charges. Oates's happy impudence, however, proved that he had been selected for his task by men perfectly acquainted with the instruments they judged necessary for their work.

"I receive your deposition, as I needs must, Mr. Oates," said the magistrate, after a brief pause, "You may take your oath; but whether you are a most monstrous perjurer, or the saviour of this nation, God alone knows, and time will show."

"And rest assured, worthy Sir Edmundbury," said Oates,

kissing the sacred book, without flinching, "that by this sign I shall conquer—and the corn and wine are to him who reaps and vintages, as well as to him who sows and to him who prunes."

"For my part," replied Sir Edmundbury, with prophetic gloom, "*I shall have no thanks for my pains, and, I believe, I shall be the first martyr.*"

Oates smiled, somewhat darkly, and began repeating the solemn words of the adjuration after the clerk, when Blood whispered Mervyn, "Let us out and wait him there. I shouldn't wonder if the roof were to fall!" And he shouldered his way very rudely out, followed closely by the amazed acolyte, who, recollecting that Oates was at St. Omer in May, 1678, had his own private reasons for doubting the stability of the justice-room.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

THE colonel halted in the vestibule of the office, which was closely besieged by a dense throng, whispering and discussing the important revelation, as it was communicated to them by the more fortunate listeners within. Mervyn had no time to vent his surprise in words. The doctor followed almost immediately, having, as he expressed it, set the stone a-rolling, and was received with loud manifestations of gratitude, respect, and curiosity. He separated himself with difficulty from the crowd, and bestowing upon them a gracious benediction, proceeded down the street amidst deafening hurrahs. He soon, however, thought proper to elude this popularity, by slipping down an alley leading to the Strand, where he was rejoined by Blood and his *protégé*.

"What think you of matters now, Master Colonel?" he exclaimed, in a tone of triumph. "My Loard Shaftesbury scarce thought me worth the honour of his contempt some few hours since, but what now? In a fortnight I shall have prouder heads than his ducking to me, or I will bring them to the block.'

"I would, then, thou couldst include mine old enemy, old Ormonde, and his spitfire son in the list," said Blood, grinning savagely. "But, doctor, since our affairs are in such a prosperous train, you must come with me to my poor house in Alsatia, and dine on such hermit fare as an outlawed man can muster."

Oates readily consented, and the hospitable colonel called a sculler, which, at his direction, rowed them down the river. Mervyn's eyes were now in some measure unsealed, and the light which was breaking in on his understanding was anything but welcome. The extraordinary revelations which Oates had made, coupled with his own dim ideas of the drift of the Jesuitical policy, confused at once his judgment and his feelings. On one hand were all the prejudices of his youth, the love and reverence in which he had been educated, on the other a vision of horrors of dark and iniquitous policy, which he knew not how to connect. His ignorance of the world in general, and of the actual position of men and events, contributed to suspend his decision and to perplex his mind almost beyond the power of forming any opinion of the truth or falsehood of Oates's statement. Still, he had an instinctive abhorrence of that bad man; and had he been aware of the terrible consequences which were to flow from his perjuries, it is probable that nothing but actual force could have induced him to follow his fortunes farther. As it was, he seemed rather bewildered into non-resistance than submitting to an authority which he recognised.

"Yonder is my house, or mansion I may call it, for such it hath been in its palmy days," said the colonel, pointing over the dancing waves to an antique and ruinous-looking building with a high balcony, which seemed hanging over the river, and which was crowned with a mass of tall chimneys. It was an isolated building, surrounded by a high garden wall on the land side, which separated it from the wildest and most haggard district of the Friary. Mervyn thought he had never seen so dreary and comfortless a dwelling. The wooden-work and pillars of the balustrade seemed all rotten and falling down; the latticed windows were broken and stuffed with rags, as if to exclude the cold winds of the river. Indeed, the whole mansion seemed only to stand until a strong gale came to blow it down. The original frame of the house had been altogether woodwork, but it

seemed to have been patched and repaired at some remote period with bricks, which lay in ruinous piles.

Mervyn shuddered as he contemplated his future home.

"And was this august building part of your inheritance, colonel?" said Oates, laughing. "If so, I marvel not his grace of Ormonde hath left you quiet possession of it."

"Nay," said Blood, laughing too, "I do but call it mine, to take it from the reproach of belonging to no one; but, thank Heaven, I pay neither rent nor taxes for it. Indeed, I do not know its owner's name, nor if it hath any. I took possession of it because no man else had courage enough to live rent-free at the risk of being frightened to death by the ghost of some old miser, who once lived in it; ay, and died in it, before he was due in death's books by fair computation."

"How do you mean, brother?" said Oates, more seriously.

"Why, it was deserted on account of some superstitious story concerning its former inmate," replied the colonel—"some horrible legend, which makes even the most houseless wretch in the Friary prefer the stormy heavens for a covering to any shelter which its broken roof can afford. They call it the Haunted House, and it has been tenantless these thirty years, until I (he continued, lowering his voice), who seek not men's herding, chose if for my den, wherein I have spent many a quiet night, with my good conscience for company. Yet 'tis something dismal to be alone there, and this boy's society will be of infinite satisfaction to me."

"What story do you speak of, sir? Why do you call it the Haunted House?" said Mervyn.

"But are you not afraid to let these men hear you?" whispered Oates, glancing at the watermen, two strong, ill-looking fellows, in a garb which was something between a tattered livery and a sailor's.

"Not I, faith; they are both honest fellows—that is, diabolical rascals," replied Blood. "They may be of some future use to us, Oates, for one of them is a discarded footman of the Catholic Lord Bellasis, for whom your deposition is to procure a lodging in the Tower."

"Well, what haunts this house, ghost or devil?" said Oates.

"'Tis said," replied Blood, "that an old miser, the

last possessor of my mansion, was therein murdered by his own and only son, a profligate wretch, to obtain the unhappy old man's gold."

"Alack! that a man should toil all his life merely to quicken his own destruction," exclaimed Mervyn, shuddering.

"You will generalise that observation when you get older," replied the colonel; "meanwhile this legend diffuses a salutary terror round my abode, which makes me enjoy a solitude to which the deserts of sandy Arabia are populous. And now I must turn pilot, for it asks some small dexterity to land when the tide's in."

The colonel then posted himself at the helm, and directing the men to lull their oars, turned the sculler, and shot right across the water with great dexterity, although the tide ran high on their broadside. As they approached the shore, the ruffianly lanes and haggard dwellings of Alsatia became distinct; but Mervyn's attention was absorbed in the mysterious mansion which it seemed he was to consider as his home. They were steering under the ruinous balcony, towards a dark archway, fashioned in the basement story, which terminated in a flight of stone steps, leading up to a massive door, barred and cross-barred with iron. Blood explained that when the tide was in, the archway always had sufficient water to carry small craft to the stairs, but when out, no one could enter without wading to the neck in mud. As he spoke, they shot rapidly under the arch, and in a moment the sculler touched on the steps. Mervyn then perceived that a faint light fell from an iron-grated lattice above.

Blood dismissed the sculler as soon as his guests were on the stairs, and taking a massive key from his doublet, and slipping two heavy bolts, he opened the door, and bade them welcome to his castle. "I doubt not," he added, jestingly, "but that the ghost will make you welcome too, for I shall not treat you at his expense, unless he grudge us the shelter of his old leaky roof. And that you may know him for the master of the house, if you should chance to meet him, I will describe him as the tradition runs. 'Tis a lean, shrivelled, sad old man, with a broken neck, his head hanging on his left shoulder, and dressed in grey linsey-woolsey, with red stockings and leaden buckles—which I suppose is the traditionary

recollection of him as he appeared at the crowner's quest."

As the colonel gave this inviting description of the inmate of his establishment, they entered a dilapidated hall, surrounded by a wooden gallery or corridor, on which opened the doors of the principal apartments. The second story was raised above, on massive carved pillars, communicating by a staircase with the first, so that the roof of the hall ascended to the height of the whole building; and was elaborately ornamented with dark oak carvings. Light was originally admitted down the staircase from an octagon in the roof, composed of carved compartments, with a bull's-eye of stained glass in the middle; but time and decay had caused many fissures in the roof, and the sun streamed in various directions among the dusty timbers which crossed it. The whole mansion, ruinous as it was, bore tokens of having once been the residence of an opulent family, whose riches, indeed, had left their taste in arrear. The walls were of black mahogany, very curiously but uncouthly carved, and the river damps had covered them with a fine white moss. The floor had been inlaid with coloured stones, but was now broken, and in some parts overgrown with long lank grass, and Mervyn, as he entered, slipped, with no very comfortable sensations, over a frog which lay couched in his path.

Ascending a broad flight of stairs, massively balustraded, they entered an apartment to which Blood guided them, slamming the door after him with a clap which startled a whole tribe of swallows in the roof above. They were now in a large square apartment, presenting an aspect of dreariness and desolation which sunk like a weight on Mervyn's young heart. The windows were high, and jealously barred with iron, admitting through their narrow panes a sort of foggy daylight. The walls had once been painted in distemper, with divers groups from heathen mythology, but the damp and injuries of time had almost effaced the designs, and only left some random legs, hands, arms, and drapery, with one or two masses of clouds and foliage. There were few or no signs of human habitation, except the blackened hearth, a heap of straw, which looked like the lair of a wild beast, some faggots, a cloak, and a musketoon over the carved mantelpiece.

Blood laughed at the dismal glance which his companions

cast around them, and striking a light with his pistol, desired them to set to work at kindling a fire, while he went out for some meat and vegetables to cook. Oates was not at all pleased with this arrangement, but, as he was ashamed to confess his cowardice, the colonel took silence for consent, and went out. Mervyn heard him distinctly unbar and unlock a series of doors, but his departure was so abrupt that he scarcely saw in what direction he made his exit.

Left alone with the direful being who called himself his protector, Mervyn began to feel the full horror and uncertainty of his position. At the same time he felt powerless to extricate himself from it, and that his only resource for the present was submission. He spoke not a word to Oates, but busied himself in kindling the fire and chopping the wood; but the doctor, dismayed at the deep silence of the deserted mansion, began questioning him as to his opinion on the events of the day. Mervyn eluded these inquiries as well as he could, but, ultimately, they must have produced replies by no means agreeable to the questioner, when, fortunately, Blood returned, announcing his approach by the same process of bolting and barring. He had a basket of beef-steaks, two or three loaves, bacon, eggs, and a large plaice, besides divers relishing matters to eat with them. As for drinkables, he stated that he had a barrel of as fine claret as was in the king's cellar, and some brandy of the first quality, which he bought of a smuggler, one of his friends.

"I gave him shelter in my mansion," said the colonel, with considerable dignity, "at a time when he was hotly pursued by the myrmidons of justice, and he slung himself a hammock, which he left me by way of legacy when he went on his last cruise—last, indeed! for the poor devil was slung up at his own yardarm, by the injustice of an admiralty court. His room will be yours, Mervyn, and you will find his hammock very comfortable. Poor Joe Bluff!—he was as honest a fellow as ever was hanged—which is saying a bold word."

Blood now turned up his sleeves, and began the operation of cookery with the zeal and skill of an amateur, interspersing his doings with an account of his early campaigns under Cromwell, in which he said he acquired his dexterity in the culinary art. Nor did he praise himself

without cause, for, considering that he lacked almost all the utensils of cookery, he executed his task admirably. The fish and steaks were broiled to a nicety on the embers, and though they had only one dish and two knives among them, the dinner was divided with great equity, and swallowed by appetites not disposed to be fastidious. Blood dived into some remote cellar for claret and brandy, and there was abundance of both, and of first-rate quality.

Mervyn was quickly overcome by the potency of these liquors, or it may be by some additional delicacy introduced by the colonel into his drink, and he grew so drowsy, that much as he disliked the idea of being alone in any part of the gloomy old mansion, he requested Blood to show him to his hammock. Accordingly that gentleman conducted him to the door, and pointing to the story above, told him to take the first apartment to his right.

Mervyn soon found the room indicated by his host, and entering at a door whose rusty hinges refused to close, he found himself in a chamber altogether destitute of furniture, except the boasted hammock swinging by a rope from a carved angle in the roof. On this was a straw mattress which smelt very musty, and an old sail by way of counterpane. Sleepy as he was, Mervyn was hesitating as to availing himself of the comforts thus placed at his disposal, when Blood entered with a lamp and a bundle of straw.

"You must learn to do at Rome as they do at Rome, and put up with a soldier's lot," he said, somewhat kindly, and spreading the straw on the hammock. "So don't make yourself wretched, child, and imagine you are friendless in the world; for I like you, and Thomas Blood never loved or hated but some one was the better or the worse for it. Besides," he added, relapsing into his usual tone, "if you feel very dreary, you have always a rope at command."

And with this facetious observation, the colonel retired with his lamp, leaving Mervyn alone and in darkness, to revolve the agreeable wit contained in his parting remark.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE COUP D'ÉTAT

On the day following the events above narrated, all London rang with the particulars of Oates's deposition, heightened, of course, and diversified according to the relator's humour. Oates appeared before the council, with a tale similar to that which he had made to Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, but with several additions of circumstances and persons. He stated that the Jesuits had long been suspicious of him, and intended to murder him, from the discoveries they made of his plans, had he not withdrawn himself from their power. He accused them of causing and fomenting the rebellion in Scotland, in order to distract the government; and in addition to his former accusation of Coleman, he accused that person of being acquainted with the whole conspiracy, and an active worker in it.

The ferment excited was inconceivable to one who had looked merely on the tranquil surface of the nation, without fathoming the groundswell of opinion and passions which raged below, and was now suddenly brought into violent play.

Many Jesuits and their papers were seized, and a warrant issued against Coleman. The Earl of Danby hoped, by extreme zeal in this outburst of fanaticism, to outbid Shaftesbury and the popular party. Coleman had, however, a whole day to make his escape, probably not without connivance of the authorities. But, unhappily for himself, he thought it sufficient to baffle so unsupported an accusation by putting his papers out of the way, which he secretly did, but he forgot a drawer in his bureau containing a portion of his correspondence with La Chaise during the years '74, '75, and a part of '76. These included the foolish and treasonable correspondence of the secretary with the French court to obtain money, and a vast deal of matter concerning the hopes and plans of the Catholic party, which in that plotting age were easily wrested into conspiracies against the religion and constitution of the state. When Oates and his victim were confronted before the council, Oates did not actually know him, but when

he heard his voice, he made a lucky guess, from other circumstances, who he was. Coleman accordingly was committed on a secretary's warrant.

The King, in whose presence Oates was examined, detected him in so many prevarications, that he declared he gave no credit to what he said. In particular he detected a remarkable flaw in one portion of Oates's evidence, which, had not the madness of the times roared down the voice of reason, must have overthrown his whole plot. He alleged that when he was in Spain he was carried before Don John, who promised assistance in men and money to the English Jesuits with unbounded liberality. Charles quietly asked what sort of man Don John was, and Oates, from a general idea entertained in England of the Spaniards, replied that he was tall, thin, and olive-coloured. The King, however, happened to have seen Don John in Paris, and knew him to be short, fat, and very fair-complexioned. And from this brick he judged of the whole building.

But it was too late to stop the current of opinion, and unhappily the detested ministry of the day hoped to regain popularity by joining the hue and cry, which they were well aware might become an irresistible engine in the hands of the opposite faction. The King showed his opinion of the whole affair by leaving town the next day, his ostensible reason being to attend the races at Newmarket.

Coleman's letters, however, were now discovered, and seemed to lend a fatal corroboration to all Oates's allegations. Although they in no particular confirmed his imaginary plots, the general outline was such as needed but the colourings of popular fanaticism and fear to establish an identity. This correspondence proved, in words, what no one doubted—that for many years a design had been on foot to root out the great northern heresy. The letters were filled with cravings for money, and general insinuations of the necessity of armed assistance in the accomplishment of certain indefinite plans, which chimed in fatally with the general suspicions of the people. But when the first rush of popular fury was over, the English people, as they always do, began to use their reason. A rigid comparison of the contents of these letters with Oates's assertions was made, and found not to confirm them on any one point or particular, and when its news grew stale on the public ear, the plot would probably

have languished and died away had not a more vigorous breath infused new life into it.

The genius of the storm which was rising round the throne of Charles II.—that wild, restless, yet most politic spirit of Shaftesbury—perceiving with intuitive sagacity all the rich harvest of advantages which might be reaped from the whirlwind, would not suffer it to expire in a few ineffectual murmurs. Accordingly, this cloud, though at first but of the bigness of a man's hand, gradually collecting its terrors, and fraught with lightning and darkness, was about to burst in a storm which, with all the devastations and horrors which it inflicted, purified the atmosphere of opinion, and prepared it for the glorious sun of toleration.

Returning to our hero, he continued for some days a sort of prisoner in Colonel Blood's establishment. He was, indeed, allowed the free range of the vast, deserted mansion, a privilege of which, after a brief glance through a few of the lower chambers, and disturbing many broods of rats who had long held quiet possession, he cared not to avail himself. The mansion bore irrefragable tokens of the suspicious terrors of a miser's existence, and of the laborious efforts made by its last unhappy possessor to provide for that security without, which failed him from within. Almost all the windows on the land side were either blocked up, or so high, and secured by such massive bars of iron, that exit or inlet were equally impossible. Mervyn, however, by climbing up on the pillars of a room which, to judge from its dilapidated remains, had once been the library, and looking through the broken panes of a lattice, obtained some general idea that on the land side the mansion was surrounded by a large ruinous garden, ornamented, according to the Elizabethan taste, with statues and fountains to imitate an Italian pleasaunce, but all broken and overgrown with weeds. The garden was flanked by lofty stone walls, spiked at the top; but so utterly gone to decay were its once splendid parterres and terraces, that but for a few tall flowers waving their melancholy beauty among the general desolation, one would have thought it had never been anything but a wilderness.

Imprisoned in this melancholy mansion, Mervyn passed his time drearily enough: its utter solitude, broken only at long intervals by visits from one or two ruffianly-looking

personages, who came and went he knew not why nor whither. Blood artfully contrived to reconcile him to this extreme seclusion by representing that, owing to the ferment into which Oates's discovery had thrown the nation, the Jesuits were arrested everywhere, and severely maltreated, and that he, as a disciple of St. Omer, would run great risk. He even tried to frighten the youth by hinting that, in the present state of the popular mind, he ran some danger of being torn to pieces if he were discovered, and gave an appalling description of the maltreatment of the five Jesuits already seized on Oates's evidence.

Nor was this dread without ample foundation. Shaftesbury and his party secretly took every measure to increase the vulgar fear and rage, till it rose to an ungovernable height, and the national mind rushed from a state of apathy into absolute madness. The fatal effects of Danby's policy were now evident. But for him the plot might have been stifled in its birth, under the King's contempt and the nation's indifference; but that great hallucination of a statesman else remarkable for his sagacity in steering clear of storms—the persuasion that it was possible to retrieve his popularity by joining the rush against France and popery—led him on to his own ruin, and that of the cause which he sought to serve.

During those long and solitary hours which Mervyn was now condemned to pass, many gloomy reflections came to him, touching the events of his life, his disgraceful birth, his unfortunate escape from St. Omer, and the accidents which had befallen him since his arrival in England; and all these puzzled and grieved him alternately. It seemed, indeed, as if he were led along by some irresistible fate to an end which he could not divine, but which was certain, inevitable, not to be questioned, but obeyed. His imagination was haunted, too, by a bewildering idea of some connection between his fate and that illustrious name of Aumerle, which had met him at every step. This idea was strengthened by accidentally stumbling, in one of his rummages in the rat-haunted library, on a genealogy of the Aumerle family, shrined in the pages of Gascoigne's *Mirror of Honour*. By this he learned that the second title of that most ancient and wealthy house was Mervyn; and though Oates had hit upon a happy reason for this curious coincidence, it did not satisfy our dreaming hero. Yet what

relations could exist between the son of a French robber, executed at St. Omer, and the high baronial house, whose deeds and renown were part of the history of England herself—ancient, all-glorious England ?

He had questioned Blood, in a very roundabout and ingenious manner, as he thought at the time, concerning this great house of Aumerle ; and he learned, with some emotion, that it had been extinct for many years, the last earl—he who had committed suicide in the Tower—having died without issue. He was very importunate also to learn from Blood his father's name, as he professed to know it ; but the colonel assured him that, for certain reasons, it was necessary to defer the communication ; and this imposed another strong restraint on Mervyn's impatience. Meanwhile the colonel treated him with great kindness, with much more indeed than could have been expected from his rugged nature. He took delight in teaching him the use of the sword, of which he himself was a perfect master, and such points as might be useful to him in his destined profession, which, according to him, was to be that of a soldier. He told long but amusing stories of his own campaigns and of Cromwell's battles, in almost all of which he had been engaged, and never failed, on returning from excursions, to bring in budgets of news and anecdotes afloat concerning the plot. Whether by design or not, these revelations constantly afforded glimpses of Oates's real character and motives, which amazed the innocent scholar of St. Omer. Blood seemed to enjoy his wonder and horror, probably contrasting his own seared and unquailing conscience with the freshness and spotless simplicity of the youth's, and smiling at his ignorance of the vicious theatre on which he was destined to play a part.

One day the colonel ventured out in broad daylight, though in a very elaborate disguise, and, returning about sunset, found Mervyn engaged in a melancholy reverie over an old missal which he had brought with him from St. Omer. Blood was evidently in high spirits, and remarking, with a smile, that they were going to have company, told Mervyn to help him in preparing the apartment for the reception of visitors. The youth mechanically obeyed, and was soon persuaded, from the pains which Blood took, that the visitors must be of some distinction, and by no means such as had recently honoured them with calls. Blood

swept the hearth, made a bright fire, brought two or three trusses of straw to serve instead of chairs, and lighted some torches, which he placed at intervals about the room.

Having arranged these things, he sat himself down with a hearty curse, and a half comic, half wondering exclamation at the turn of fortune which had made a housemaid of one of Cromwell's Ironsides. After this he changed the strain to impatient exclamations at the delay of his friends, and at last, wrapping himself in his cloak, he went down the staircase leading to the corridor by which he usually made his exit, and which he never suffered Mervyn to penetrate, intending, as he said, to look out for these visitors. Half an hour elapsed before he returned, and then it was in company with a man who, however wrapped up and disguised, Mervyn instantly recognised as his venerable friend, Dr. Oates.

"And how doth Joas like the sarvice of the temple?" said Oates, greeting the youth with a crafty smile.

"He prefers any to the devil's!" replied Mervyn, with a complimentary glance at the doctor.

"Let queenly Athalie then beware, for Joaida will doubtless find it some day in his interest to betray her," said Oates, with another of his unsightly grins at Blood.

"When that day comes, thou prophet in Israel," replied the colonel, "thy neck will be as near the hangman's rope as ever to thy canonical cravat!"

"Why, man, I have ate, drank, and slept these twenty years with that rope round my neck; but never yet saw I the Death's valet to tighten it," replied Oates: "and I trust I never shall; for methinks I am now in sight of a rich harbour, where I may lay up my sea-worn timbers, and go to pieces at leisure, in a quiet, honest way. And let me tell you, Blood," he added, in a particularly gloomy tone, "were it for nothing but the toil of mind and restless fears of this kind of life, 'tis good to be virtuous. Yet for all that, Brother Mervyn, methinks I shall make as good a Protestant saint as ever was catalogued in your popish martyrology."

"The fiend, for aught I know, might make the same," said Mervyn, his eyes flashing with tears of rage. "But I tell thee, Oates—I tell thee, devil! as surely as thou hast betrayed the holy faith thou mockest with a Judas kiss, so surely shall thy perjuries be made manifest, even on

earth, and thy name become the synonym of detected crime."

"Wilt *thou* bring on this scarecrow sequel, my young mouse in a trap?" said Oates, jeeringly.

"I will peril life and health, soul and body, Heaven assisting, in that good work!" replied Mervyn.

"Why then, we must spike you in the trap, instead of tying you by the tail, and playing with you awhile ere we bestow you on the cat, little Brother Mervyn," returned Oates.

"You forget, friend Titus," said the colonel, significantly. "'Tis true, the cheese was yours, but the trap is mine, and I have taken a liking to my little mousey—and I should like to see the man that dare but look unkindly on the thing I love."

"Nay, I like little Ishmael well enough myself," said Oates, changing his tone very suddenly, "and of that I shall give proof some of these fine mornings."

"I had rather a serpent crushed me in his folds," replied Mervyn, and seizing his missal, he seated himself, in a perturbed silence, on the hearth.

"Well, well, Blood, talk as thou wilt," said Oates, after a moment's pause, "but 'slife! I had rather thou hadst the breaking of this wild young steed than I. Methinks I can easier guide the course of that mad elephant, popular opinion."

"Look that it tear thee not to pieces in thy turn," replied the colonel. "The good steed doth but rear and play, but throws not his experienced rider. Hark! Paul's tolling twelve; these gallants should be here."

There was another brief pause, during which the crackling of the blazing wood was alone audible; then came a splash of oars, and a shrill whistle without. Blood started up, seized a torch, and left the apartment. Mervyn continued to read, without even looking at Oates, whose dull, malignant eyes were, however, fixed on him.

The sound of footsteps ascending the stairs was soon audible, and several voices in eager conversation, some of which Mervyn thought he had heard before. The door opened, and Blood appeared, lighting in four cavaliers in long roquelaures and slouched hats, the two foremost of whom he recognised as Shaftesbury and the Lord Howard. The third was a tall, stately-looking gentleman, but with

a countenance singularly proud and morose. The last cavalier, a young and very handsome man, dressed with elaborate richness, as appeared when he laid aside his cloak, had a cheerful, winning countenance, though characterised by the reckless profligacy remarkable in almost all the portraits of Charles the Second's courtiers. This cavalier was, in fact, the brave and beautiful "Absalom" of Dryden's satire, he who

> "Whate'er he did was done with so much ease,
> In him alone 'twas natural to please:
> His motions all accompany'd with grace,
> And Paradise was opened in his face."

"You see, my lord duke, men stand no more on precedence in plots than in battles," said Shaftesbury, bowing to Monmouth, as he entered first.

"Nay, I will dispute no man's right to be hanged or shot before me," replied the duke, "and, least of all, yours, my Lord Shaftesbury."

"'Tis for his Majesty to regulate all such honours," said the Lord Howard, glancing sharply round. "Ha, what—Mr. Oates's *protégé* again?"

"And Colonel Blood's, my lord," said that gentleman, with a slight smile; "and I hope, when the Monmouth and Shaftesbury administration commences its glorious career, the *protégé* of all your lordships."

"Tut, colonel, I am no administrator, I want only the sword of the state in my hand!" replied the duke. "Give me that—soldiers, not clerks—and let who will wield the pen."

"Your grace chooses more bravely than wisely," said Shaftesbury. "The days are past or passing when force held the sway, and a time is coming when a grey goose-quill shall be more powerful in good or evil than the sword of Alexander."

"Meanwhile, let us keep ours sharp," said Monmouth, smiling sarcastically. "Trust in the Lord, brothers, as Cromwell said to his Ironsides, but keep your powder dry."

"At all events, my lords, you are all very heartily welcome to my poor roof," said Blood. "Beseech you all take a rude soldier's greeting, and be seated. But I thought, my Lord Shaftesbury, that Colonel Sydney and Lord Russell were to be of the consult?"

"Thou art still a novice in men's affairs, then, sir," replied the earl. "These are not the men for such a business as we come about. Russell is too honest, and Sydney is too inflexibly just, to adapt themselves to the tortuous policy the age demands. To work well, such men must believe in their cause, and suspect no shadow of wrong in its brightness. Well, Mr. Oates," continued he, turning to that personage, "since we last met, you are grown a great man. Prithee, is your doublet too narrow for you yet?"

"I hope, my lord," said the duke, "that though our friend be of a sudden and a monstrous growth, he will not prove a marsh-mushroom, and shrivel into nought as soon."

"Whatso foot crushes me, I will make his path slippery, my loard," said Oates, emphatically.

"*Our* ground is slippery enough already—we slide on watery ice," said the third cavalier, in a gloomy voice. "Mr. Oates, whether this popish plot be true or not, rests with your conscience. I pretend not to burden mine with the knowledge; but it is my solemn duty, believing in its existence as I religiously do——"

"And I," interrupted Howard, with a peculiar grimace. "And I, my Lord Essex—but take it in any light you will, 'tis the most marvellous contrivance to oust our enemies that hath been hit upon since the days of Machiavelli."

"And yet the good Danby thinks to ride our storm as if he were the Magus raising it!" said Shaftesbury, tartly. "Poor courtly gentleman! as if a lord high treasurer could ever become a tribune of the people."

"But methinks the whole discovery is but a sickly bantling, that will ne'er see manhood," said Essex.

"It needs crutches, Essex, only crutches," replied the earl. "We must strike some *grand coup*—such as Richelieu would have struck, not Sydney's Marcus Brutus! I will confess, Master Oates, I did anticipate little or nothing from the first divulgement of your great plot; but it takes marvellously, and if we can but preserve its life till the parliament meets, I will engage to make an engine of it that shall thrust these ministers from their seats for ever."

"And my blessed uncle of York!" exclaimed Monmouth. "I care not to play the babe in the wood, to be mossed over by all the robin-redbreasts of faction in the world."

"You cannot love his highness less than I do," replied the

earl, with a malignant smile. "But you are too hasty, Monmouth—sudden and rash, not politic and slow, as hath been the way with those who would mount by pulling down. Some day you will run yourself within the meaning of the statute of Edward III., from whose meshes my utmost skill can hardly keep myself disentangled."

"Then I will rush into it sword in hand, and so cut the cords!" said Monmouth.

"Do not eat your fruit in blossom, my master," said Shaftesbury, calmly. "The day may come when it will be fitting to storm the citadel; at present we are merely throwing down its defences."

"Why, faith, I am weary too of this hesitating policy," exclaimed Howard. "I am of Prince Rupert's opinion—to fight first and reason afterwards."

"He was of that opinion at Marston Moor," said Shaftesbury. "And yet I doubt if matters came to a full push, my lord——"

"You doubt what, Shaftesbury?" interrupted Howard, colouring deeply. "What mean you by that pause?"

"Nothing, Lord Howard," replied the earl, very quietly, "nothing—but that no good husbandman scythes his corn while it is green. And methinks that you, who have the fairest wife and richest estate in England, should play more cautiously in such a desperate game than we poor melancholy bachelors."

"The lady is fair, but then—she *is* my wife," said Howard, carelessly. "And as to the estate, faith, we have shackled it cursedly during her life, and after that it is entailed to a remote rascal of the Aumerles."

"I have a wife whom I dearly love, and children whose rights I would not peril for the apple of mine eye," said the Earl of Essex, "forasmuch as 'tis better to be a dog of a curious breed in England than a poor man; but I will wager all—life, children, wife, property—sooner than submit to arbitrary power and popish tyranny."

"And I," said Monmouth, "have a sweet mistress whom I love better than all ye do your wives, but she as well as I will throw life and love on the rich die of a crown, though fate hold the stakes against us."

"Let not Sydney hear you talk of a crown, Monmouth," said Shaftesbury, gravely. "I have heard him swear he cares not, if there must be a tyrant, whether James of York

or James of Monmouth be he. Sydney is for a free and glorious Republic, caring not whether himself be the first or last of its citizens, so that the gradations be allotted by merit—as indeed he need not, for that would place him foremost."

"Well, let him bring back the old Republic, and then they will need a Cromwell," said Monmouth, laughing. "But methinks, colonel, the air of this chamber is too damp for anything but a frog. Have you a cellar here?"

"It were argument of great ignorance of the court to invite the Duke of Monmouth without some such provision," said Blood. "Ichabod, go draw us a tankard from the black cask to the right as you enter, chalked Lachrymæ C."

"Prithee, plain Canaries for me, an it suit your cellar bill, mine host," said the duke. "I'll drink none of your Italian popish wines, lest Oates here indict me. And this is your Ganymede, old Thunderer? A comely youth, good sooth."

"Yes, and fit for a better service, which your grace may some day afford him," replied Blood.

"Faith, yes, an he can wield a sword," said Monmouth. "Thy fortune is made, child, if thou art as well fitted for the fields of Mars as those of Venus. Can he draw blue steel, Blood?"

"In a good cause, my lord duke, to the death," replied Mervyn, boldly.

"My lord duke!" repeated Shaftesbury. "How knows he that? Is he safe, Blood, that you trust him so far?"

"I will answer for his honour with my life," said Blood.

Mervyn, darting a resentful glance at Shaftesbury, made his exit with the tankard.

The cellar was at some distance, and it was several minutes ere he returned with the wine. His re-entry was scarcely noticed by any one but Blood, who motioned him to put the wine down, for Shaftesbury was speaking with peculiar earnestness and in a low tone.

"The plot is staggering," he was saying; "it cannot survive unless some new blood be poured into its exhausted arteries. You know well, Oates, that the King's incredulity, and the non-appearance of those murderers of yours, gave it a heavy blow. I scruple not to allow that I was about to give thee and the plot up, friend, when the thrice-fortunate discovery of Coleman's letters occurred; but rest assured

they will only condemn him, not justify you. People are already coming back to their senses, and your credit stands a chance of waning away in a slow consumption, and its owner of ending at Tyburn, like poor Mocedo."

"But, my loard, that cannot be," said Oates, tremulously. "The nation has clearly taken part with me in the discovery of the ploat, and Coleman's letters, though doubtless confirming me in no particular, do in all the general matter most amply and substantially confirm my tidings out of Gath."

"At all hazards," said Howard, "it will not do to let the plot fall. 'Tis a mine that will burst on the engineer, or like an overcharged cannon, wreak its fury on those who loaded it; and we shall but have raised the popular fury to gorge itself in our own destruction."

"And if I fall, it shall not be alone, nobles of Israel," said Oates, gloomily. "And I will make but sorrowful sport for the Philistines."

"And what can such a poor forlorn wretch as thou art do, with a parcel of trumpery inventions?" said the earl, with ineffable contempt. "'Tis but to let you sink by the weight of your own lies to the bottomless pit of ignominy."

"Nay, now; but what I mean, my loard," said Oates, in an abject tone of submission, "is but this, that though I am willing to save the nation by any path your lordships can point out, I feel not within me the courage necessary to win a leaf in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, when Dr. Tongue brings out his new edition."

"It were, indeed, too much to burn thee out of one fire into another," replied the earl.

"And hark ye, man, we do not mean to abandon you," said Monmouth; "so look a little less like a condemned ghost, for know, we are all embarked in the same boat, and will sink or swim together."

"My lord Monmouth, you are good at the oar, but pray you meddle not with the helm," said Shaftesbury, very sharply.

"And men say, Shaftesbury, you are fond of navigating stormy waters, and showing your dexterity by coasting amidst shallows and breakers when the open sea would better serve," replied the duke.

"'Sdeath! my lords," exclaimed Blood, impatiently, "methought it was allowed at all hands that the doctor's

credit is to be supported by hook or by crook at all risks."

"The colonel is right. Policy forbid we should desert so good a cause," exclaimed Shaftesbury, after a deep pause of rumination. "Be of good cheer, Brother Oates. *Costa che costa*, we must support you, and will. The existence of the plot must be supported by some fine stroke—something to fix suspicion on the Duke of York—such as the ill-treatment of some popular magistrate mixed up in the affair. What if assaulted by Catholic ruffians *masked and disguised*?"

"Would you slit some worshipful nose, as the court—or rather the colonel here—served poor Coventry?" said Howard, laughing.

"If it be aught that needs a strong arm, I have one at the devotion of the cause," said the colonel.

"Well, 'tis no treason to drink to the success of all honest designs," said Monmouth. "Where is the sack? Ha, Ganymede. The boy is surely warming his blood at thy expense, colonel, but, indeed, it must be nigh frozen."

"He is here, my lord," said the colonel, turning to his young cupbearer, who was standing motionless with surprise at these revelations.

"'Slids, Blood, I like not two witnesses to what a crown lawyer may construe into a variety of queer shapes," said Shaftesbury, hastily. "And methinks 'tis late for such a mere boy to be from the pillow. Send him thither, colonel."

Blood reiterated this command, though in a very mild tone, and Mervyn withdrew in proud silence. Blood, however, recalled him to receive a goblet of wine and a torch, for he was going without either, and, bowing respectfully to the company, he retired.

CHAPTER XXIV

WANDERINGS IN AN OLD MANSION

With a sad and hesitating step Mervyn left the apartment, and as the door closed, and he found himself alone in the ruinous corridor, the full desolation of his position rushed overpoweringly upon him. He proceeded, however, mechanically, up the silent staircase, to his own miserable chamber, and there placing his lamp on the floor, he sat down beside it in utter despair. He thought of that sweet and innocent peace of his young days at St. Omer, under the severe but benevolent eye of Van Huysman, and drew a melancholy contrast between his present wretched condition and the golden reveries of ignorance which had lured him forth on the troubled waves of the world. Unacquainted as he was with the passions and politics of the times, Mervyn still had ample materials for fearful conjecture concerning the projects of the extraordinary society assembled with so much mystery in such a place. Rigidly educated as he had been in submission and filial love to the Church, in whose bosom he had been reared, his conscience was fretted and stung by the certainty which he now possessed, that he was in the power of men plotting against her very existence. As he meditated long and deeply on this circumstance, recollections of the solemn benediction by which Oliva had dedicated him, came in full force upon him, and his present condition, in the service of the Church's bitter enemies, assumed the hideous aspect of a crime against Heaven itself.

While these ideas thronged upon him, he began to meditate the propriety of escaping from what he almost considered as shackles of the Evil One. The prospect of throwing himself alone and friendless on the world had no longer such terrors to him, for he felt an energy and resolution which his excited fancy represented as promptings of some good angel. The time, too, seemed propitious; his captors were absorbed in their own dark projects, and he need fear no espial on the part of Blood, who generally watched his movements with anxiety. But then, was escape possible? Mervyn sat ruminating for some time, and at last, with a vague hope that he might find some outlet which had yet

eluded his researches, he rose, took his torch, and left the apartment.

He listened for a moment with one foot in the corridor, throwing his light far and searchingly around, above and below. But all was silent as the grave ; the thin rays of moonlight, piercing among the dusty beams of the roof, crossed each other in fantastic forms, and illuminating the hall below, threw into it shadowy and indistinct masses, which at the first glance seemed like an assembly of dark spirits watching his motions. A moment's observation served to dissipate this illusion, and he proceeded cautiously on his survey. Room after room did he open of those communicating with the corridor, and found in all the same darkness and the same disappointment. Bare walls mouldering with damp, rotten floors that yielded an insecure footing as he crossed them, high and narrow windows blocked with triple bars, and some few decayed relics of former habitation, probably not deemed worth removing, were all the discoveries he made.

Vexed and chilled with the result of his gloomy survey, he returned into the corridor, and stood for some minutes leaning wistfully over the balustrade. While thus engaged, his eye fell by chance on the staircase below, which, touched with the white beams of moonlight, seemed of carved stone, and reminded him of a flight of steps which he had observed in his last visit to the cellar, and which he remembered had excited his curiosity as to whither they might lead. The idea occurred instantly, that perhaps, in this jealously-constructed mansion, those stairs might lead to some outlet not known, and, therefore, not secured by Blood. At all events, he determined on exploring them, for if they led to disappointment it was but one added to many.

Accordingly he descended the old crumbling staircase, taking great pains to prevent any creaking which might betray him, and reached the hall, where he paused and looked round him. Hearing and perceiving nought, he trod along with a bolder step, and opening a door imperfectly concealed by its resemblance to the panels of the walls, he entered a wide kitchen, which seemed capacious enough to have cooked a dinner for an army. But even the tiled floor was overgrown with grass, and frogs hopped about on the very hearths ; indeed, there were many tokens of a visit from the river, on a level with which were the kitchen

windows. A pantry communicated with this apartment, in which was a trap-door leading to the cellars. Down this Mervyn boldly proceeded, and a few steps brought him to the floor of the cellar, which was of large extent, and suited the general proportions of the mansion. The walls were dripping with damp white moss, and the air was so dense that Mervyn's torch seemed as if burning in a mist. On the opposite side of the cellar, over a range of arches, was the flight of steps which he had remarked. It was very narrow, and unrailed, as if formed merely by the jutting out of massive stones at intervals from the walls, and, throwing his torchlight upwards, Mervyn saw that it terminated in a black archway above the cellar.

The young adventurer hesitated not a moment to continue his exploration ; and though the stones were covered with slippery incrustations, and some of them trembled as he trod, he boldly proceeded. Some fifteen of these steps brought him to a level with the archway, which, as a glance informed him, terminated in a very narrow doorway. The door, however, was evidently of massive materials, though it yielded easily to his pressure, and swung heavily back on its hinges.

Mervyn was on the point of stepping forward without reflection, when luckily he perceived, but with a deadly sensation of horror, that he was about to tread into a deep square well, of a depth beyond the power of his torch to illumine. Further observation showed him, on the opposite side, a doorway corresponding to that at which he stood, and a massive door of oak, clamped with iron, leaning off the hinges against it. There were also remains of a drawbridge, the chains still hanging rustily on the door-timbers, and some broken pieces of ironwork adhering to the threshold.

This obstacle seemed, at first sight, insurmountable, and Mervyn also recollected, with a chill of horror, certain particulars of the old miser's murder, which he had not noticed much when he heard them, but which now struck his memory painfully. He remembered to have heard that the parricide and his accomplices effected an entry into the old man's apartment by laying a beam of wood across the well in which he usually kept his treasures, in an iron cask, and, after completing the terrible deed, had dropped his corpse into the well, to give him an appearance of having met his death by accident. This dreadful association almost un-

nerved the young explorer, and the torch quivered in his hand, as if in an ague-fit; but he rallied his courage by a strong effort, and began examining the well with minute attention.

Mervyn had little doubt that the door on the opposite side opened into the unhappy miser's bed-chamber, and still less that it must have some exit contrived for his security—at least, some communication with one. He determined, therefore, at all hazards, to attempt exploring it. But at first this seemed impossible, for there were, apparently, no means to cross the frightful chasm yawning between. On consideration, however, he imagined it would be no difficult task to leap it if he had any means of staying himself on the opposite threshold after the shock. Looking upward, a dangling rope caught his eye, and reflecting that it must needs be of great strength, and well fixed, to bear the weight of gold which the rich miser had daily lowered into the well, he caught hold of it, and examined it carefully. Though somewhat worn and blackened by time, he still thought the rope strong enough to bear his light weight, even if obliged to trust to it wholly; and he confided much in the skill and activity which had always enabled him to bear the bell among the students at St. Omer. He began to fear, however, that he should be obliged to abandon his torch, which was no very pleasant alternative on such an adventure; but again, on deliberate thought, he imagined that he could keep it in his left hand, while with his right he grasped the rope. This idea he paused not to weigh in very nice scales, fearing lest his resolution might fail; and, winding the rope round his hand and arm, he leaped.

The events of the next two moments, for it occupied but a brief flash of time, ever afterwards appeared to him like the recollection of some insane dream. He remembered that his foot slipped on the very edge of the threshold—that he was thrown back, and in a moment hung struggling over the abyss, with a dreadful pain in his shoulder and arm, as if his weight were dragging them off. And then he seemed to grasp at the rope with his left hand, still tenaciously keeping the torch, and with a sensation to which no language can do the faintest justice, he saw the flame mingle with the rope—fire it! The rest was a mere effort of instinct, for mind was lost in intense horror. But he found himself, he knew not how, standing secure on the

stonework of the doorway, still grasping the torch and a piece of the rope, the remainder burning above him till it came to the iron roller, where it became extinguished.

Mervyn's first use of speech and reason was to utter a fervent *Laus!* which came spontaneously to the lips of the young acolyte of St. Omer. He then endeavoured to move the broken door sideways, but its prodigious weight made that impossible for his strength; and certain that he could not return the way he had come, he was obliged to apply his efforts to pushing it forward. In this he succeeded, and the massive portal fell with a thundering bang on the floor of the apartment, seeming to ring in echoes through the whole mansion. At the same time a thick cloud of dust rose, and almost stifled the young adventurer, and he heard a sudden sound of scrambling in the chamber, which made his heart palpitate violently. A moment's reflection convinced him that this clatter was caused by rats, and he plainly distinguished three or four crossing the floor in the wildest haste, and squeaking as if in the claws of a cat.

Mervyn was not without apprehensions that the noise of the falling door might have reached Blood and his fellow-conspirators, and he listened for some minutes in a state of very great perturbation. The deep uninterrupted silence which succeeded reassured while it appalled him, and he ventured to cast a cursory glance round the chamber, his cheek whitening as he perceived the justness of his conclusions, that it had been the unfortunate miser's. He found himself in a large, irregularly-formed apartment, which still bore many tokens of the use to which it had been applied by its former tenant. There was a huge old mahogany bedstead still remaining, very elaborately carved with Gothic Cupids and festoons of vines and grapes, but all covered with dust and cobwebs. The bed, the pillows, the rich old counterpane of raised damask were still there, all rat-eaten, black, and mouldy with neglect; and Mervyn's hair almost bristled on his head when he thought that these things were probably left just as they were found on the morning of the murder. The walls were covered with tapestry, but the designs were too thickly laden with dust to be distinguished, and Mervyn saw that the cornices had once been gilded, but probably half a century before even the miser's era. There was very little furniture beside, but it was massive and of a very dark rich oak, finely carved.

The keenest scrutiny could not, however, discern the main object of his search—an exit. There were, indeed, two iron-barred lattices, which he perceived by as many streams of wan moonlight; but on approaching and examining the wall with more attention, he perceived a door between these lights, strongly barred with rusty bolts.

Somewhat disheartened by this formidable obstacle, still the recollection of the position in which he had placed himself compelled him to persevere. He set his torch down by treading a small hole for it in the rotten floor, and applied himself with all his strength to unfasten the bolts. The rust, combined with their heaviness, made his efforts for some time almost without effect; but at last he succeeded with one, and, encouraged by this glimpse of good luck, renewed his toils with a zeal and patience which were ultimately rewarded by the yielding of what he believed to be the final bar between him and liberty. He set his knee against the door, and made so violent a push that it opened suddenly and pitched him forward, so that he fell over his torch and extinguished it. He sprang up again instantly, and found himself, with what surprise and disappointment may be guessed, in the balcony which he had noticed on his first arrival, overhanging the river at a great height.

The moon shone with tranquil lustre from a sky of dark and cloudless blue, and vexed and alarmed as he was at his position, Mervyn was soothed with the beauty and effulgence of the scene before him. But as he gazed on the dark waters beneath, the distant lights twinkling down the shores, and the hopeless isolation of his position, he felt convinced of the impossibility of escape, and his next thought was how to return unobserved to his own apartment. But then the recollection of the dangers he had encountered to reach this point, and the utter impossibility of venturing back the same way, occurred to him. All the tales he had ever heard or read, of men who unwittingly ventured as he had done, into places whence they could find no exit, and so perished miserably of starvation and horror, crowded in dismal procession through his imagination. The terror of this idea extinguished the superstitious dread which had seized him, and he stepped resolutely back into the miser's chamber.

All was perfectly still, but the moonbeams, stealing in at the open door, threw the old dusty furniture into fantastic

groups, with ghastly reliefs of lights, which a terrified imagination might easily conjure into spectres. But Mervyn felt that his very life depended on his coolness and self-possession. A moment's reflection had now convinced him that there must be some other approach to the miser's apartment than over the well in which he kept his gold. He concluded that in his former cursory glance he had not noticed it in the dusty tapestry, and he thought by feeling all round he should light on the door, if any existed. He began, therefore, and searched the wall round, with an eagerness which seemed to refine his sense of touch to an almost painful delicacy ; but he could find no trace of an exit. He raised his eyes, casting a despairing glance round the chamber, and at the moment thought he observed the dark hangings of the bed moving to and fro. This he accounted for, after a pause of indescribable terror, by supposing them to be ruffled by the breeze from the river ; but as the motion increased, the thought flashed into his mind that the phenomenon was occasioned by a *thorough draught*, as no other portion of the damask was disturbed. He resolved then to search the wall on the opposite side of the couch, and presently started to find himself standing in a beam of moonlight, which streamed from a hole in a corner of the ceiling. This hole seemed just wide enough to admit the body of a slender man, and Mervyn perceived the relics of a trap-door lying at a triangle over it. A sort of perpendicular ladder was formed in the wall of narrow juttings of wood, similar to those used in stables to climb lofts ; and Mervyn clambered up recklessly, as one in a dream, and forcing his way through the hole, found himself on another floor.

It was some moments before the confusion of his ideas, and the deep darkness around, allowed him to form any notion as to where he had landed. He then conjectured, by some scanty beams of light struggling through apertures in the roof, that he was in some large garret or loft. He now felt certain to find an exit, most likely into the upper corridor, and resumed his operation of groping. He had hardly commenced, however, ere he heard a low murmuring sound of men's voices, engaged in a muttered conversation. The sound evidently came from below, and he concluded that he was near the conspirators whom he had left in discussion. He observed at the same time two or three

darts of thin light in the floor, and on examination he saw that some of the boards were rat-gnawed into holes, which extended through the ceiling of the room below. Applying his eye to one of them, Mervyn perceived with considerable surprise that he was directly above the apartment in which he had left the conspirators, and that they were all below, seated round the wooden table engaged in close and eager conversation. Shaftesbury was speaking in his low deep tones, and Mervyn caught nothing of what was said but a continuous murmur, until the Lord Howard spoke in a raised and angry voice.

"Not so, my Lord Shaftesbury!" he said, vehemently. "I yield to no man in admiration of all the dull commonplace maxims of morality,—they are so useful to deceive the mob; but methinks if, as I have oft heard you say, the end sanctifies the means, and as I know myself, success justifies all—I see not that the preservation of this great nation is not well worth the sacrifice of one poor old mumbling puritan."

"I will have no concern in such bloody handlings, Howard," replied the earl, sternly. "I care not to be hanged in a silk rope, which they tell me is the proud distinction of our rank. But for any small matter which should stop short of such Newgate ruminations—suppose, for example, that *the Papists* inveigled him into some lone desert trap, like this old mansion of yours, Blood, which I marvel the devil still props above your head!—that masks (jolly fellows, whom the colonel could easily levy among his Tyburn resolutes) seized, bound, and gagged him—perchance conveyed him to some place where 'tis known the duke's power extends, as if to have him there murdered; and then, by some anonymous betrayal, his life may be saved,—and the popular fury be lashed into as wild a madness as if the quaint old gentleman were hacked into mincemeat for the Pope's supper."

"Verily, and on my salvation, I think I know the way to work your lordship's counsel," said Oates, eagerly. "I know one who hath the custody of some chambers belonging to some of the Duke of York's paupistical knaves in Somerset House, whither our goats of the atonement might easily be conveyed."

"And, faith, I know no man of the whole batch that could be easier trapped," said Howard. "He goes out

alone, at all hours, in blind lanes and alleys, on the scent of thieves and beggars (on both which scores he is thine enemy, Blood). Indeed, he hath of late conceived a notable project, which should make some of us Jew-ridden lords tremble, for he runs on a monomania of taking up all mendicants and vagrant poor, to force them, forsooth, to work!"

"'Twas not without an eye at these peculiarities that I selected him from among so many worshipful of the faction, for the doctor's *début*," said Shaftesbury, "though I warrant me there were hundreds—Sheriff Bethel and my Lord Mayor, for example—who would have made better handselling of it."

"And did not your lordship note his word, about being the first martyr?" said Oates, in his crawling tones, which made Mervyn feel sick at heart with loathing.

"But are you sure of your little cock in the loft? Is he sound at roost?" said the earl, uneasily looking at the door. "Where is he? I would not he were playing the eavesdropper; for, as Dr. Tongue justly observed on a late occasion, 'tis too strong meat for babes."

"Nay, he is fast asleep by this time, I'll warrant him," said the colonel, taking a lamp. "But, however, I will go and see, for I love to have two nails always in one hook."

Mervyn sprang up on this intimation, and instantly perceived, by the gleam of Blood's torch, who was now in the corridor below, that there was a door to his left. To open it, leap over some old tubs piled on the landing-place, trip down the corridor, and throw himself panting and breathless on his hammock, was but a moment's work. The next, and Blood peered in at the door, throwing his lamp over head, and glaring with his large wolfish eyes towards the youth, who kept himself perfectly still.

Luckily, the colonel contented himself with the assurance that his captive was safe, without subjecting him to any close inspection, and retired on tiptoe, leaving Mervyn in a state of anxiety which effectually precluded all hope of changing his assumed into a real slumber.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CONSPIRACY

Mervyn spent nearly an hour after his vain researches, ruminating on what he had seen and heard, but unable to detect any clue to the tortuous labyrinth in which he was involved. The only clear conclusion he deduced was, that some insidious treachery was meditated by the faction in which he found himself involved, but against whom, or by what means, he could not divine, only he understood in general that it was to support Oates's villanous assertions. He was too thoroughly unacquainted with mankind, and the reckless politics of the age, to imagine the real drift of Shaftesbury; and he thought it impossible that a nobleman of his high rank, once the second magistrate of the kingdom, could really instigate so daring a breach of the laws.

Unable at last to bear the suspense into which these cogitations threw him, he resolved on returning to his hole in the garret, and ascertaining, if possible, some exacter meaning to the discourse he had overheard. On returning thither, however, he found that all the company were gone excepting Oates, who was sitting over the fire, engaged in a murmuring conversation with Blood, but in so low a tone that he could make out nothing distinctly. The two worthies were solacing themselves with some burned wine, which Blood had on the fire in a pipkin.

Finding it impossible to make out what they were discussing, and fearful of being discovered, Mervyn at length returned to his hammock, and endeavoured to compose himself from the nervous excitement into which he was thrown. It was long, however, before he could accomplish this, and he only succeeded at last, in some degree, by forming a resolution that, on the first opportunity, he would question Blood himself as to the meaning of what he had overheard, and if his replies were not satisfactory, he vowed to venture all—life itself—rather than remain in his power. With this determination, he dropped into a perturbed and dream-haunted slumber, from which he did not awake till a late hour the following morning.

With the morning, however, returned his habitual dread of the man he was to take to task, but he persevered in his resolve, though with somewhat diminished courage. He descended with a flushed countenance and feverish pulse, but found, not without a sense of relief, that Blood was not there. The house was completely desolate; the staircase, by which the colonel made his exits, barred and bolted; and, according to custom, he had provided the youth's breakfast, and some cold game-pie for his dinner, leaving the key of the cellar significantly beside it.

Hours passed in this melancholy solitude; night came, and with it darker and sadder fantasies, readily prompted by his forlorn situation and recollections of the scenes of the previous night. But every thought was at length lost in impatience and indignation at Blood's prolonged absence, for it was midnight before he heard the doors unlocking and the colonel's step on the stairs.

Another disappointment awaited him. Blood was accompanied by the two watermen whose ruffianly appearance, while rowing them thither, Mervyn had previously noticed. Late as it was, these gentlemen were invited to sup with their conductor; but he was determined to have his explanation, and for that purpose sat out the whole of the banquet, somewhat to the dissatisfaction of Blood, as he evinced by frowns, and various hints on the harm he did his health by sitting up so late. Mervyn, indeed, took no pains to conceal his discontent; and the colonel, afraid lest his companions should notice it, suffered them to withdraw on the first intimation of their wish to that effect.

During his absence, while escorting his guests to the exit, wherever that might be in this enchanted mansion, Mervyn endeavoured to rouse his courage, and succeeded in putting on an appearance of calm, when the colonel moodily re-entered, with the keys jingling as usual at his belt. He resumed his seat, with a stern but somewhat anxious glance at the youth, and deliberately stirring the fire with a flaming piece of wood, inquired what the fiend he meant by staring at him with those large melancholy eyes of his, which he declared were enough to make a cat drown herself in a fit of despondency.

"I mean, Mr. Blood," said Mervyn, passionately,—"I mean that I am weary of being imprisoned without

cause, and desire to breathe the free air, which is denied to none but criminals."

"Do you, indeed, Monseigneur?" said Blood, quietly. "Well, and I, too, should be very glad to take the air of the Mulberry Gardens, at open daylight, but am, nevertheless, obliged to content myself with rambling out at night, like a wehr-wolf, as the musty-headed Germans call it."

"But I have never committed any offence that I should be mewed up like a chicken fattening in a coop," exclaimed Mervyn, for the ice once broken, even his reasonable dread of the colonel could not prevent the utterance of his pent-up feelings.

"But you are a little Jesuit, my master," said Blood, "and as such, fit for enterprises of great mark and moment; and there are fifty pounds blood-money on the capture of all Jesuits. Now, though you are young, boy, you may have heard that the ichneumon destroys the crocodile in the egg, eh? Besides, my dear Ichabod," he added, with a kind of jeering earnestness, "you are at this very moment crossing the huge Atlantic, sold as a slave to a planter in Virginia!"

"What, then, Colonel Blood, am I to be kept a prisoner all my life?" returned Mervyn.

"Something other ails thee, Mervyn, than the mere loss of liberty—which cannot be much to a student of St. Omer," said Blood, looking at him suspiciously. "You colour, my master!—troth, child, that complexion of yours will never do for this world. Confess the truth—you have heard somewhat of last night's confabulation, and know not what to make of it?"

"'Tis true, colonel," replied Mervyn, resolutely. "I deny it not, and I suspect that you intend to commit some act among you, of I know not what lawless violence, to support the lies of the black apostate, Oates!"

Blood looked at the young speaker, for a moment, with a ferocity of expression which made him tremble, but it suddenly changed to its usual crafty calm.

"Thou art right, young Jesuit," he said, with a gloomy smile. "Thou art right—and I am glad, child, you have broached the subject, for I wished to speak to you on it. Learn, Mervyn, that reckless and violent as I may appear to you, I am incapable—that is, I could not do—ahem!—

any act that savoured rather of treachery than valour. But I am a poor man, and money, at this season, is of unspeakable consequence to me. Did you understand against whom this plot was laid ? "

" Some Puritan magistrate, methought," replied Mervyn, without hesitation. " But the matter seemed knavishly turned against the Duke of York."

" Right again," said Blood, his eye dropping from the steady gaze of Mervyn. " Right again, nephew. But there is something in thy noble frankness of disposition which encourages me to trust thee in something more than a half-confidence. Sheriff Bethel, as he is still called, a most vehement partisan of the faction, is the man who is to be seized ; but, Mervyn, I confess to thee, I am only in the plot to betray it ! Shaftesbury's bribe is already in my purse, so that motive's gone ; and, nephew, I was born in the Catholic Church, and intend to die in her forgiving bosom. But our holy mother, Religion, gives nothing for nothing : and what greater service could I do to her than to expose this monstrous plot, contrived for her overthrow ? Ha, Mervyn, do you feel marrow enough in your bones to aid me in this great work ?

" Death itself would be pleasant to me in such a cause," exclaimed the youth, cajoled by Blood's earnest tone and apparent feeling.

" Oh, we shall not die, but reap a rich reward for our welldoing," replied Blood. " We shall obtain the favour and gratitude of the duke, which methinks may well be balanced against the giddy patronage of a wild faction, which will provoke the King at last to hang them all like a string of onions. Moreover, child, do you remember in whose company you first saw me ? "

" I know not, but it seems to me as if I had seen you long ere these times," replied Mervyn, musingly.

" Pho, pho, child ! you never saw me before that night with the King and his merry men," said Blood, very sharply.

" Well, and as they seemed to treat you with great respect and confidence, I marvel at your ingratitude in joining their enemies," said Mervyn.

" Nay, if you gape at man's ingratitude, your mouth will be wide enough ere you die, boy," returned Blood, with a sardonic laugh. " But in this instance I am the exact opposite of my fellows, for they appear true and are

false, while I appear false and am true. In short, Mervyn, I am devoted soul and body to the court, and all I do is at its dictation, that I may lead the conspirators on to the point whence their own plots may be driven back upon them."

"Good angels! you are a spy of the court?" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Yes, and of the Church, whose redemption is in this hand, stained with blood as some deem it," said the colonel, raising his hand vehemently, and clutching the air with his deformed thumb and finger.

Mervyn shuddered, and some painful but indistinct thought ran through his mind, the traces of which he lost instantly. "Colonel Blood," he replied, mournfully, "you well know that from my childhood holy hands dedicated me to the service of the Church; but you do not know what I now tell you, that I would freely shed the last drop of my blood to obtain her forgiveness, and mine own just revenge on that cunning monster Titus Oates."

"Why then, dear boy, I will be your coadjutor," exclaimed Blood, seemingly in a transport of delight. "You shall be my medium, my interpreter, and win the applause of all loyal and good men. At the same time your desire of a change shall be gratified, and I need not skulk about, at the deadly peril of my life, on my difficult negotiations with the court. But before I trust you with my whole mystery, Mervyn, swear to preserve my secret inviolable, against everything but the rack."

"And the rack too—no torture shall wring aught from me but blood," said Mervyn, with enthusiastic violence.

"Well, then, boy, our royalist counterplot is also ripe," said the colonel, in the same tone. "I have received the King's orders to make a deposition of all I know, concerning this traitorous conspiracy, before a magistrate. Among all the London justices, his Majesty selected him before whom Oates made his first deposition, Sir Edward—what is his name? oh, Sir Edward Godfrey—to receive mine; and this because the duke hath done him service, and he is known to be well affected to the royal cause. Thou wilt see—our counterblast will blow up this Protestant mine, and spare a whole ocean of innocent Catholic blood, beside advancing the great plans of the Church. But of this more to-morrow, Mervyn; at present we are both weary, and I

would not engage you in my dangerous plans (for they *are* dangerous) without giving you time for due reflection ; and so, consult your pillow, and good-night."

Pronouncing these words, Blood arose, and handing a torch to Mervyn, began making preparations for bed, by unclasping the hanger and pistols from his girdle. Knowing that it would be useless to attempt protracting the conversation, Mervyn retired to his dismal chamber, with a somewhat lighter heart than he had left it. In the morning, when he descended with renovated and brightened looks, he found Blood preparing breakfast. It was not long, however, before he resumed the conversation of the previous night, by inquiring when his new services were to commence.

" This very morning, if you will, son," replied the colonel. " I have received private and sure advice that the Ormondes suspect I am refuged in Alsatia, and spies are about in every direction. Therefore I dare not stir out on peril of my life—yet the King enjoins me to make my deposition in time to save Coleman, and the five attainted Jesuits."

" But how—but how, Mr. Blood ? " exclaimed Mervyn.

" I am in possession of certain tokens by which I doubt not to induce Sir Edward—I mean, Sir Edmundbury—to meet me in some privy place, and there take my deposition —if I could find a messenger of fidelity," said Blood slowly, and cautiously eyeing his youthful victim. " But he must be one indeed of fireproof fidelity and courage, for if the faction do but suspect my purpose, regard for their own lives will compel them to sacrifice mine suddenly. Dost understand, Mervyn ? "

" But Sir Edmundbury Godfrey !—why he in particular ? " said Mervyn.

" I know no other whose prying disposition, courage, and secret leanings to our cause would allow him to accede to such a request," replied Blood, quietly. " Moreover, I have here a letter from the Duke of York, assuring him of the perfect safety, and advantage to the King, with which he may comply with my request. But the messenger. I know not whom to trust on such an errand."

" And what is this messenger expected to do ? If it be only to die rather than betray you, Blood, I——" said Mervyn, but he paused suddenly, startled by the cold malicious smile in the colonel's eye. At the same time a vague but momentary suspicion of some darker play flitted

over his imagination, but vanished instantly in the bright daylight of his young heart.

"Expected to do, child?" said Blood, affecting not to notice this flash of doubt. "Why, he must be merely a messenger—no tell-tale babbler, prating on all the vain fancies and fears that haunt the brains of idle men. He must, in short, know nothing—be nothing *but* a messenger—or he may chance to run his neck into a halter. Then you must swear—I mean, if you have heart enough to work your own and the Church's triumph—that if the justice will not observe the conditions noted in this paper, that neither threats nor entreaties shall induce you to guide him or his myrmidons to this den of mine."

"But what conditions are therein noted, Mr. Blood?" said Mervyn; "are they yours or the duke's?"

"Both," replied Blood. "But mine are briefly these—that if he come at all, he come *alone*. I know better than to trust a head with three thousand pounds upon it within reach of Mother Justice; and that he inform no man whither nor on what purpose he comes. For the duke's, he will not object to them unless he have some peculiar dislike to change his knightship to a baronetcy, and his beggarly justiceship for a mastership of his highness's household."

"I will be your messenger though death pay the postage," said Mervyn, in a tone of solemnity which touched even Blood. "But mark me, colonel! If there be any treason in the core of this mystery, I will not survive the moment which makes me its unconscious instrument. If you mean any wrong beneath this fair seeming, depend on't, I will rather die than suffer it. I will bring all Alsatia about your ears; you shall murder me ere you harm one hair of his head."

"Gad-a-mercy! what manner of talk is this?" said the colonel, staring with partly real and partly affected surprise. "Do you think, sir, I am a murderer by profession, and wish particularly to bring a London mob to hunt me out of Alsatia?"

"No, Blood, I will trust in you," said Mervyn, earnestly. "I will trust in you, if you will swear to me, by all your hopes of pardon above, you mean nothing but fair play; for I will throw my life on the die."

"Dost think that such an oath were difficult to take by a man who could have such designs?" said Blood, grinning.

"But be it as you will, I swear it. So may Heaven absolve or condemn me for ever as I mean harm to Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, in life or limb. But now, Mervyn, you must in turn pledge your word that, if you fail in your enterprise, you will not attempt to escape—tush! I mean you will return with the news."

"I pledge my honour, Blood," said Mervyn.

"A Jew would not lend you a penny now on that pawn," said Blood, smiling. "But you are a gentleman of Nature's making, and I will take your word sooner than a merchant's bond."

"But what if Sir Edmundbury disbelieve my tale, and have me seized?" said Mervyn.

"He will not—he dare not—after he has read this letter," replied the colonel, producing one sealed with the royal arms. "And if he does, I have the King's pledge that pardon shall be extended to you."

"But how shall I get him to come hither?" said Mervyn, with lingering hesitation. "Will not the very locality frighten him from coming?"

"'Slife! no, I warrant ye," said the colonel, eagerly. "Why, man, he is in the daily and nightly habit of prowling about the Friary in all manner of disguises; and when he hath marked his game, of a sudden the bloodhounds of the law invade the sanctuary, and sweep away like kites among chickens. Well, well, if you will not go, let Oates rule the roast, and a pretty banquet he will serve at last."

The very sound of that detested name kindled all Mervyn's passions into a flame, and he consented at once to the colonel's arrangements. It was determined that he should start immediately on his adventure. Blood produced from his wardrobe a short cloak of orange-tawny velvet, embroidered with the royal arms, and a three-cornered hat, with gold plumes, which, he said, he had procured to disguise him, if he consented to undertake the office. Mervyn put these garments on, not without some little satisfaction at the change effected in his appearance by the magic of dress, and was then conducted by Blood to the gate by which he had originally entered, where he leaped gaily into a boat that seemed waiting, returning Blood's shake, and Good be with ye! but not noticing the dark smile with which the colonel watched him row off, and the private signal he exchanged with the scullermen.

CHAPTER XXVI

SIR EDMUNDBURY GODFREY

It was towards ten o'clock on a Saturday morning when Mervyn reached his destination, and leaping on shore, found himself for the first time abandoned to his own responsibility, in the heart of a great city. The novelty of this position put him in high spirits, and he looked around with a proud and confident look, as if he felt that his time of trial had arrived, and that he should not be found wanting. They were now at Westminster Stairs, and thence one of the watermen directed him to Sir Edmundbury's house, which was at the back of Whitehall Gardens. It was a low building, but exceedingly neat and handsome, surrounded by a pleasant garden, and all the usual appurtenances of a man of some dignity and considerable wealth.

The door was opened by a tall, stiff, puritanical-looking maid, dressed with the most frigid propriety, and quite old and ugly enough to prevent all scandal against the magistrate, who was a widower. Mervyn was admitted instantly, on sending up a message which Blood had taught him, and was conducted into an apartment in which the justice usually transacted his official business. It was bare and unfurnished except a few benches, a desk for the clerk, a high chair for the magistrate, and an old timepiece. Sir Edmundbury was seated at this desk, poring over some papers, with a thick, squat, silver-clasped Bible beside him. Near him sat a tall, hard-featured man, in the dress of an Independent minister, with a black skull-cap compressing his thin grey hairs. They seemed engaged in conversation, which broke off when Mervyn entered. Salutes were exchanged, and Mervyn observed the minister glance from him to Sir Edmundbury with very marked and emphatic surprise. The youth, however, handed his letter with no other comment than a deep bend, which Sir Edmundbury hastily acknowledged, and broke the seal with visible emotion. He read the contents with a puckered brow, and, as it seemed, twice, before he gave any reply.

"Heaven have mercy on us all! but to see how He works His will on earth; yea, at times, with visible mani-

festations," said he at last, turning to the clergyman. "I have but just, as you know, received a severe rating from my Lord Danby for taking Oates's deposition before the council had examined him, and now here are events coming to light which—but I forget, Master Baxter, you are a fautor of the plot."

"But of justice more, Brother Godfrey," replied the doctor, emphatically. "If the unhappy and misguided men, now imprisoned on these heinous charges, be innocent, God forbid that one drop of their blood should be shed to save the Church itself from ruin. But what new discovery have you made? Ah, brother, brother, I fear it flows from too impure a source to be good and healing waters. This young man wears the duke's livery, I'll warrant me, as well in his heart as on his back."

"I am in the service of no master, but of the cause of truth and justice, sir," replied Mervyn.

"Nay, then methinks it would have been better policy to leave that glittering garniture at home, especially on a visit to me, sir page," said Godfrey, somewhat peevishly. "But I am warned you know nought of the contents of your charge, and so far well. I must fare out, Brother Baxter, for a while; but be not impatient, as you may depend on my word, that this day's work will bring us into good favour with the court, and all who love justice, whose snowy mantle I am bound by mine oath to keep pure, even at the risk of my life."

"And yet beware, my dear friend; the proverb says, look before you leap," said Baxter solemnly. "'Tis not for me to question and cross-question you as to your incomings and outgoings, yet I would say, look to your feet, lest they be entangled unawares in some papistical snare."

"Nay, Richard, nay," said Sir Edmundbury, hurriedly; "I have oft enough been in the district whither I am going, and am nothing the worse for it at this time of day. There are matters in this document I may not doubt nor hesitate upon. And deem you this youth looks like a messenger of ill faith?"

"It was of your spiritual, not bodily, safety I spoke, brother," replied Baxter, coldly. "And for the youth, I dare be pledged he is honest, for he hath honour written very fairly in his countenance. Nay, then go, if your duty be concerned."

"You say you know nought of the matter wherewith this paper charges me, youth," said Godfrey, eyeing him very earnestly.

"I am to conduct your worship—whither you know—to meet the writer," replied Mervyn.

"If thou, with thine honest face, wilt guarantee my security," began the justice, and then paused with a forced smile, and, taking out his snuff-box, inhaled a long aromatic pinch, adding, "but what canst thou, either to save or slay?"

"I pledge my own life and honour on your worship's perfect security," replied Mervyn.

"Well, then, precious Master Baxter, I must go," said Godfrey, rising and tinkling a little bell beside him. "I shall be at home at two o' the day to dine—(Rachel, bring my cloak and sword, 'tis by the clock)—and hope to find you here, brother."

"Prithee, let me be thy companion," said Baxter, shifting his position uneasily. "This is a cruel and remorseless age, and who knows what plans may be afoot against us all, now that the Jesuits find themselves circumvented and destroyed?"

"By your leave, that must not be, sir," said Mervyn, firmly.

"No, certainly—no, Richard," said Godfrey, putting on his hat and cloak, which Rachel held, demurely pursing up her mouth beside him. "I am too old a bird to be caught with chaff. But I do not fear harm: the strong faith that walked beside me through the great judgments of fire and plague, and kept me alone, of all those girdled with authority, at my post, will preserve me still. If not—His will be done!—my appointed course is run."

He then put on that peculiar hat of his with the gold band, and buckling on his sword, shook hands with Baxter, and prepared to depart.

"Yet I hope thou wilt not leave this staff of spiritual life behind," said Baxter, offering the thick Bible. "Methinks no Christian pilgrim should venture forth on the sandy deserts of the world, unaccompanied by that most holy and precious pillar of fire walking before him in the darkness of sin."

Godfrey readily complied, and put the volume in his pocket, muttering it would be necessary to take the deposi-

tions, and they left the apartment, Sir Edmundbury repeating his assurance that he should be at home to dinner at two.

They found the sculler waiting for them at Westminster Stairs, where they embarked, and immediately rowed off towards Whitefriars. There was a heavy fog on the river, which prevented the voyagers from distinguishing aught but a confused pile of houses on the shore, and Mervyn was so absorbed in reverie, that when the boat ran up the archway of Blood's house, he started, and could scarce imagine they were there. One of the watermen now produced a massive key, which he said the colonel had given him in case he was out when they arrived; Mervyn applied this to the lock and with some difficulty turned the rusty bolt, while Godfrey looked around with deep and curious attention. The door swung heavily open, and Mervyn invited Godfrey to enter, who complied after a singular pause of hesitation. He then closed the portal with a slam, and bolting it, found himself alone with Sir Edmundbury in the ruined hall of the Haunted House.

CHAPTER XXVII

OATES'S VISITATION

On the morning of the same day on which the events above detailed occurred, Titus Oates, or St. Titus as he was now almost considered by the populace, was observed to creep down the Strand, and finally to enter the shop of Prance, the silversmith. He found the poor man, as usual, very busy, and protesting that he would not disturb him, as he merely came to bring Mrs. Prance the plan of a charitable subscription which he was raising, requested one of the apprentices to announce him. But the events of the few days which had made Oates notorious had totally altered the relations between him and the fat silversmith. Prance had, in reality, never liked him; but dread of his wife, and anxiety to conceal his popish tendencies, had made him assume great cordiality towards Oates. Now, however, he regarded him as little less terrible than the fiend incarnate himself, and therefore treated him with a lavish cordiality

that even astonished the doctor. Apologising again and again on the score of urgent business, he escorted him to the door of his wife's sitting-room, and left him with as deep a sense of relief as if escaping from the rack.

Oates knocked modestly at the door, and a female voice, mild with suppressed ill-temper, invited him to enter. Mrs. Prance was seated at a comfortable fire, engaged in knitting a pair of scarlet stockings; but her jolly matronly visage grew still ruddier when she saw the reverend visitor enter.

"Keep your seat, sister, keep your seat," he said, in a tone of condescending importance. "I am the same poor sarvant of the Loard whom ye were the first to receive with honour. Is the diamond's value increased because that the jeweller hath polished it? But ye have doubtless heard what hath happened, and how I have been called upon to take up my testimony, and become a prophet in Israel."

"We have heard indeed, Master Oates, with most sincere upliftings of the heart," said Mrs. Prance, with a sigh. "But how you can spare me a moment's precious time from your weeding and pruning in the vineyard, is indeed the crown of goodness, and a precious sign of humility."

"My present errand, Sister Susan," said Oates, solemnly, "is nothing less than the salvation of your husband, and yourself too, from ruin and beggary!"

"What mean you, Master Oates?" said the matron, letting her work fall, and eyeing the saint with peculiar earnestness.

"Be not thrown of a heap; I intend you no harm but good," replied Oates, taking her fat white hand and pressing it tenderly in his own. "You know I have always regarded you with—with a brother's love—a holy friendship passing the love of carnal men. You know, too, that I am now powerful to save or slay—that a word of mine—or at least an oath—could send your husband to the gallows, and make you a widow in the prime of your years and beauty."

"La! you, Mr. Oates? I hope not," said Mrs. Prance, with a slight dimple in her plump cheek. "I am sure I should look horrid in black weeds; and poor dear Prance! I am sure it makes me cry like an onion just to think of it."

"Your husband is in danger, Susan; his practices have been discovered!" said Oates, emphatically. "Something more than his life is at stake; for, when his servings at the

altar of Egyptian idols is discovered, his property as well as his neck is forfeit to the crown."

"Save us, Mr. Oates! you don't mean that?" exclaimed Mrs. Prance, considerably alarmed.

"But I do, Sister Susan," said Oates; "his tergiversations and dealings with the traitorous Jesuits are known in the quarter whence blows this blustering wind whereon I ride. It is in design to bring upon him all the horrors of popish recusancy!"

"Goodness gracious! and what can be done? Dear doctor, what can we do?"

"*We!*" said Oates; "*we! I* can do nothing, Mrs. Prance, unless I had some better claim to interfere than any I dare allege. If, indeed, he could be detected in some overt act which might place him in our power, I might have hopes to use the influence thus acquired to save you from ruin, and him from utter destruction in this world and the next."

"But how? Would you see him at mass in the queen's chapel?" said the matron, eagerly.

"No, no; I would not catch him in a crime of such dreadful consequence for fifty shekels," replied the worthy, with a cunning smile. "I would merely detect him in some trifling act which would demonstrate his connection with the party, and then I might use the authority so acquired to represent to him gently, as a brother to his brother, the danger and error of such popish dealings, and lead him kindly back to the sanctuary."

"But how can this be managed, precious Master Oates?" said Mrs. Prance, wiping her eyes in her apron.

"A thought strikes me, Susan," replied the doctor, soothingly. "Dry those bright jewels, my dear sister in love, and be comforted. Have I not heard you say that during the absence of Gadden the Jesuit from Somerset House your husband keeps the keys of his apartments?"

"Ay, truly, dear Oates. But you swore by everything you would never tell it," said Mrs. Prance, visibly alarmed.

"Tut, foolish woman," said Oates, peevishly, "but we must use a little honest artifice. Tell Prance, as if from the Duke of York, that the banished Jesuit hath suddenly returned in secret, that he needs the keys of his apartments, and that he must be with them at midnight in the court at Somerset House. Then, instead of Gadden, I will meet

him ; and thus taken in flagrant delict, I shall obtain and use an authority to bring him to a sense of his errors. After that, perchance, for he must know much, I may associate him in my grand crusade against the Jesuits, which is like to be a profitable as well as holy work."

Mrs. Prance listened to this crafty proposal with considerable doubt, as appeared in her countenance. With all her unbounded respect for her religious adviser, his proposal staggered her, for there is always an indefinable want of probability in the most artfully concocted falsehood, which mingles a grain of doubt in the most implicit swallower's draught. But the cajoling tongue and promises of Oates, and, above all, the terror and majesty which his recent exploits had conferred on him, finally induced her to promise as he desired.

And thus the interview terminated—at least, so far as our chronicles are concerned.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GODFREY'S LAST EXCURSION IN ALSATIA

Almost at the moment when Oates concluded his agreement with Sister Susan, the unconscious object of its crafty provisions followed Mervyn into Blood's house. He looked round, at first, somewhat surprised at the silence and desolation which seemed to reign ; but without saying anything he followed the youth, who ascended to the apartment where he expected to find the colonel. Mervyn thought, as they reached the corridor, that he heard the door below locked after them, but after an instant's hesitation, imputing it to the nervous state of his feelings, he hurried on.

They entered the Painted Chamber, where Mervyn expected, with certainty, to find Blood, but to his surprise, it was quite deserted, a few embers in the grate being the only sign of habitation. He concealed his surprise, however, and observing to Sir Edmundbury that the gentleman who was to meet him must have been detained by some accident, began blowing the embers into a flame. Whilst he was thus engaged, Godfrey seated himself, shivering,

apparently with cold, and cast a long and anxious gaze round the apartment.

"Is not this the old, ruinous house," said he, with a slight shudder, "that is known in Whitefriars as 'Aumerle's Folly'?"

"I never heard it called aught but the Haunted House," said Mervyn. "But these Aumerles seem to have been a great family; wherever I go I hear something of them."

"Yea, a great and glorious race, of a blood which has flowed untarnished with Norman mixture since the Heptarchy," replied Godfrey. "It is their proud boast that not a drop of the base and rabble blood of the adventurers who accompanied William the Bastard on his conquest, has ever tainted the course of their pure descent. They are as English, sir, as the oaks. I should know something of them. My grandfather was, for half a century, their chief steward, and dwelt in this house."

"But they are extinct now, all?" said Mervyn, with an anxiety for which he himself could not account.

"My Lady Howard is their last descendant and heir," replied Godfrey. "And as she is the last, so is she as it were the essence of all their good and bad qualities. She abandoned her most noble, wealthy, and loving husband for the poor prodigal, Howard; and when death broke her chains, conferred herself and all her wealth on her seducer. But I marvel at this choice of a meeting-place. The house hath an evil report."

"But surely your worship is not afraid of ghosts?" said Mervyn.

"Why, what manner of ghost do they say haunts here?" said Godfrey, musingly.

"Oh! a thin old man with a long grey beard, dressed in russet, with a pair of large leaden buckles in his shoes," said Mervyn, trying to force a laugh.

"Ay, such I recollect my unhappy grandfather," replied Sir Edmundbury.

"What! are you a descendant of the old miser, sir?" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Are you alone of all this scandalous city ignorant of that?" replied Godfrey, with melancholy gravity. "I am the son of that miserable wretch who imbrued his hand in a father's blood, and, flying the just punishment of his

offence, joined the unbelieving Turk, and fell under his banner at Belgrade."

"God assail him, if it may be!" said Mervyn, crossing himself.

"Amen!" said Godfrey. "But still it puzzles me that the duke should invite me to a meeting hither."

"Duke, sir! what duke?" said Mervyn, noticing this word for the first time.

"I see, boy, you are not admitted into the secret," replied Godfrey. "Time will explain all. But be not curious to learn the dangerous secrets of state, for great men heed not what innocent flowers they trample on their way to triumph."

"Pray, you, worshipful sir, explain the matter to me," said Mervyn, earnestly. "I dread no consequence to myself, but to you. Tell me, did you expect to meet the Duke of Monmouth here?"

"Now, Heaven forbid!" said Godfrey, with a start.

He was silent, and remained for some time plunged in profound and gloomy cogitation, which Mervyn cared not to interrupt, being busied in his own troubled fancies. During this pause he stirred the fire mechanically, and, while so doing, heard the distant bell of St. Paul's toll three o'clock.

Godfrey counted the strokes on his finger, and then observed with a smile. "How often in my childhood have I listened to that solemn toll as it swung over the waters, and wondered from what remote world it came. But the duke is late to keep his appointment. I warrant me now, if this were a fair lady instead of an old magistrate—but I suppose that weary business of the Dutch battle keeps him at the Admiralty."

"And, in addition, your worship's dinner-hour is past," said Mervyn. "But though we are not superfluously well off for furniture in this den of ours, Heaven be praised we have plenty of creature-comforts, and to spare for a friend." And Mervyn produced the contents of his larder, together with a tankard of sparkling claret.

The old man eagerly swallowed a goblet of the wine, and grew by degrees more cheerful as the claret and a venison-pasty disappeared under their exertions.

As they chatted away over their repast, the deepening darkness of nightfall increased the natural gloom of the

apartment, and the conversation began, unconsciously, to take a more sombre tinge. Mervyn in secret grew more and more uneasy, for he could divine no probable reason for Blood's prolonged absence, although it seemed to argue the integrity of his purpose. Godfrey, too, had his undercurrent of thought which rippled on the surface of the conversation, and sometimes disturbed its flow. In fact, the dialogue gradually dropped away into monosyllables, and, finally, into reverie.

This silence lasted some minutes, and was broken by Godfrey, who drew from his pocket the Sacred Volume with which Baxter had furnished him. "It was well done of that reverend man," he said, "to arm me with this blessed stormer of salvation. Cased in its promises as in complete steel, did I, in the time of the great plague, stand at my post when all my comrades had fled, and confronted the invisible arrows of death without one moment's trembling of purpose. And this remembrance, youth, is now one of the sweetest consolations of my sorrowful old age, and will stand like an angel of light breathing celestial peace over my death-bed. And know, my son," he added, with peculiar solemnity, "know, that when all the power and riches of this world fail to yield us a single balmy thought of comfort, the recollection of one good deed smells as sweetly in the nostrils of Death as violets to a young bride. Read me some portion—unless, indeed, you dare trust no version of this good Book but that which hath Douay on its title-page."

"Nay, I do fear no basilisk in a twist of type," said Mervyn, affected by the old man's earnestness. "Where shall I read?"

"Open at hazard, child; thou canst light on nought but what is good," said Sir Edmundbury. "I will but trespass on your patience another half-hour, and then if his highness comes not, depart."

Mervyn opened and began reading, and by a curious coincidence, the first words which he lighted upon was that terrible denunciation of a vengeance which was to visit the iniquities of the father on the children to the third and fourth generations. He broke off abruptly, and Godfrey smiled, but with a ghastly expression, as he bade him read on. "I am not afraid to hear the truth, boy," he said, "though doubtless that denunciation is the darkest shadow

on my life's path. But what can be the meaning of this long delay? It is growing late," he added, abruptly, for a sudden flash of the fiery embers showed him how dark the apartment had become.

"I know not," replied Mervyn. "I did expect to find the colonel waiting us here."

"The colonel! what colonel?" exclaimed Sir Edmundbury, in some surprise; but presently he added, "Oh, I see into your caution; but you carry it too far. I tell you the duke in his letter told me of your quality, and bade me trust myself implicitly to your guidance."

"Duke! what duke?" exclaimed the bewildered Mervyn.

"The Duke of York, boy, with whom I was to meet and discuss certain matters concerning Coleman's trial, and how he might be aided against the villanous perjurer, Oates."

"Holy Virgin! the duke? Were you not told—I mean, did you come hither—to receive the deposition of Colonel Blood?"

"Colonel Blood! it were better for me to meet a famished tiger," replied Godfrey, suddenly pausing. "Youth, thou hast not a traitor's countenance, but I tell you I had rather face the devil in person! Why, 'tis I who have been foremost in hunting him for his audacious attempt on the Duke of Ormonde, and I have heard he hath sworn to have my blood or shed the last drop of his own."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Mervyn, whitening to a statue. "No, no; there must be some fiendish deceit in this. I never saw the Duke of York in my life."

Mervyn then, with a pathetic earnestness, which persuaded the old and experienced magistrate of his truth, briefly related the circumstances which had made him Blood's prisoner or guest, the consultation which he had overheard, and the artifice by which Blood induced him to be his messenger.

"I see it all," exclaimed Sir Edmundbury. "I am brought here like an ox to the slaughterhouse. I see it all, child, but I acquit thee of any share in my destruction. But, O God, be merciful to my soul, for I know that the gloomy drama of my life approaches a darker catastrophe. The politic villain counterfeited the duke's handwriting, and I have little doubt, poor orphan, but that he reserves you, too, for destruction."

"Why, then, save yourself," cried Mervyn, vehemently. "Let us fly ere these monsters return."

"I doubt they have taken their measures better than that," replied Godfrey, shaking his head. "But do not weep, youth. I acquit you of all blame, and only marvel at mine own rash folly."

"But I do not acquit myself," said Mervyn, passionately. "And if you have courage, as they say you have even to rashness, you may yet escape. There is a way out where there's a way in."

"But no boat," said Godfrey, calmly.

"But one may pass within hail," exclaimed the youth, snatching up a burning stake. "Follow me; we can try, at least."

Godfrey complied, though it was evident he did not anticipate any favourable result, and they passed the corridor to the hall. But they found his fears realised. The massive portal was impenetrably barred and bolted on the exterior, and after exhausting themselves in fruitless efforts to break it open, they were obliged to desist.

"It is in vain to struggle with destiny," said Godfrey, at last. "The game must be played out. All my life hath a foreboding of this moment hung over me, and it finds me not unprepared."

"Let us not yet despair," said Mervyn, hurriedly; "a few minutes may remain. Can we not find—do you not remember some exit from the house on the land side?"

"There is one through the back staircase of the Painted Chamber," said Godfrey, after a moment's musing; "but I'll warrant me 'tis as well secured as the water gate."

The same conclusion instantly occurred to Mervyn, for he knew the staircase in question was that through which Blood made his exits. Still there was a straw of hope in the thought, which he eagerly caught at, and he ran wildly back to the apartment, followed by Godfrey at a slower pace. A door of almost equal strength to that on the water side, bolted and barred on the exterior, baffled their hopes, and Godfrey seated himself with stubborn resignation. But Mervyn was not yet at the end of his resources. His versatile imagination suggested another.

"The house is large, intricate, scarcely known to Blood or his associates," he said. "If you could but conceal yourself, Sir Edmundbury, I would feign that you would

not come, or that you suspected something wrong and are gone—anything rather than that they should find you here."

"And where can I hide me? they will search the very holes and cracks of the door," replied Godfrey.

Mervyn hesitated as the recollection of the apartments he had lately traversed occurred to him, and then suggested them as a hiding-place, hastily describing their position, and the advantages they offered for concealment. As he spoke, however, Godfrey looked at him with a vacant, ghastly look, and merely muttering, "I had rather die than enter that horrible chamber," he arose and tottered to the door, adding, in the same perturbed tone, "but follow me—follow me. I do remember there is a loft and a trap-door, by which I can get out on the roof—they will hardly seek me there."

Mervyn, though scarcely aware of what he was to do, snatched up a lamp, which he lighted; but Sir Edmundbury was already in the corridor, stumbling up the ruined staircase. Mervyn followed him rapidly, and saw him open the door of the granary, in which he had himself emerged on his escape from the miser's apartments. He entered, and found Godfrey groping about the walls, evidently bewildered with terror. He snatched the lamp and held it aloft, searching the massive timbers of the roof. Mervyn instantly perceived the frame of a trap-door, covered with spider-webs and loose straws, but in the middle of the roof at a considerable height above them. He pointed it out to Godfrey, who gave an exclamation of joy, handed him the torch, and looked around for some means of ascent. But there was no ladder, no loose planks, no furniture of whatever sort, by which it might be possible to reach the trap-door.

At the moment when a deliberate survey and emphatic exchange of looks convinced them of this dreadful fact, the slam of a door in the apartment below was heard, and both started as if shot. An instant of breathless silence followed, and the sound of footsteps and voices was distinctly heard.

"I am lost—the bloodhounds are on me!" whispered Godfrey, in a tone which thrilled through Mervyn's very marrow. "They are below."

The youth made no reply, but set the lamp down, stepped

silently over the chamber, and knelt to his former hole of observation. The justice of their conjectures then appeared. The door of Blood's staircase was just slowly opening, and by the gleam of the red fire down it, he saw several men in black masks, with naked swords glittering in their hands. He started up and saw that Godfrey was kneeling at another chink, and peering into the apartment below.

"Get up—get up!" gasped Mervyn, almost speechless with horror. "It is not yet too late, Sir Edmundbury!—Save your own life and mine!—Go down these steps—hither—to the miser's chamber below! They will not suspect you there; and if they do, resistance may be made. They can only enter one way—down this step-ladder, one at a time, and you may lawfully plunge your sword into them as they descend. For Heaven's sake bide not their fury. Hide yourself—under the bed, in the bed—they dare not suspect you there!"

Young and almost powerless with fear as he was, he drew Godfrey on, as it were by fascination, to the trap-door whence he remembered to have emerged from the miser's apartment, and pointed down, without uttering a word. Godfrey hesitated still a moment, but a shout from the apartment below—Blood's voice calling "Mervyn!" in its most tremendous tones—seemed to exercise a mechanical sway over him. He set his foot on the narrow step, thrust his large lean form with some difficulty into the hole, and began descending, while Mervyn held the lamp, and kept hold of his cloak, as if with the idea of thereby aiding him. On seeing him safe at the bottom, Mervyn in some degree recovered his self-possession, and kneeling down, he threw the light of the lamp as far as possible into the dreary chamber, and saw Sir Godfrey hide himself beneath the miserable coverings of the old miser's bed. Almost at the same moment he heard the voice of Blood, calling his name in louder and more exasperated tones. He paused one dreadful moment to listen, and heard heavy footsteps coming up the corridor. It was barely possible that he might reach his own apartment ere they entered and found him on a spot which would put them on the scent of their victim; and he rushed to the door. But the same instant it swung violently open, and four men, armed and masked, as he had seen in the apartment below, rushed in.

"Where is Godfrey, boy?" shouted a voice, whose detested tones roused all his remaining courage to desperation.

"Where I hope you shall not find him, devil!" he retorted, in a tone of defiance and energy, which startled them all.

"Villain! hast thou betrayed us?" exclaimed the foremost mask, whose terrible voice could belong to no one but Blood.

"Villain in thy face again, thou black betrayer!" shouted Mervyn, his eyes sparkling fire. "Godfrey is gone—fled—I have saved him, and I glory in it! I discovered your murderous intentions in time to prevent them—and now do your worst!"

"Hell and fury, brat! what hast thou dared to do?" yelled Blood, raising his massive fist, and seeming as if he needed but a word to crush the youth into atoms.

"If you strike, Blood, I will strike again!" exclaimed the heroic stripling, raising his arm, and looking at the colonel with a resolute expression of rage and defiance.

"Boy!" shouted Blood, clutching his wrist, and almost paralysing it in his vice-like pressure. "Thou knowest not, thou madman by inheritance!—that a blow, a single blow, cost thy father his life, and that which he loved dearer—his honour."

"Let me have the mauling of the young reprobate," said Oates, pushing forward. "I'll warrant I'll teach him his duty to lawful superiors—the young popish Jesuit plotter!"

"Hands off, Master Oates, an you care not to see your nose as flat as your forehead," said Blood, shaking loose the murderous clutch which Oates had fixed in the boy's neck. "None shall harm him that hath not first made an oyster of my throat. But now tell me, dear Mervyn, on your life tell me, what have you done with the old man? I have come to bear the testimony you wot of, and these gentlemen are present as witnesses."

"Why then is this accursed wretch of your company?" exclaimed Mervyn. "No, Blood, I tell you I have discovered your cruel, perfidious plot, and Godfrey has escaped by my means."

"'Slud and 'oonds! then we are all lost—we shall be hanged to a man," groaned Oates.

"Why then the devil and the hangman will get their

due," replied Mervyn, scorn and hatred flashing in his fine eyes.

"But 'tain't possible—the old 'un can't have bilked us," said another of the masks, whom Mervyn had no difficulty in recognising as Bedlow, the waterman. "I bolted the water gate, and t'other way would take a barrel of gunpowder to burst open."

"Bedlow is right—he must be concealed in the house," exclaimed Blood. "Hunt, search, lads; our very lives depend upon the matter."

"All your search will be in vain," exclaimed Mervyn, forgetting in his agitation the peculiar position of the house. "He has escaped through the trap-door, by the roof—search away! Long ere this he is out of your power; but I trust you will soon be in his."

"Give me your torch, Bedlow; if he got on the roof, he must be still there," said Blood, deliberately. "The house is completely isolated—surrounded by garden and water—he cannot escape us, except by breaking his neck."

"But how could Godfrey get up to the trap-door?" exclaimed Oates, peering upward with his villanous eyes. "There are no means that I can see, unless he crawled up like a rat."

"He is a tall man, and with this young rogue's assistance might reach those beams, and thence swing himself up," exclaimed Blood, laughing and rubbing his hands. "So we have him now. Oates, lend me a lift of your brawny shoulders. Bedlow, keep the kid in order."

Brother Titus readily complied with this request, and Blood, springing from his broad back as from a stepping-stone, seized hold of a cross-plank, and thrust himself up among the timbers of the roof. Clinging only to the frail support of some loose rafters, he succeeded in reaching the trap-door, and found it firmly secured with rusty bars. Mervyn's account of the escape was obviously impossible. Thundering out a terrible volley of curses, the ruffian communicated this fact to his fellows below, and dropping his bulky frame the whole length of his arm, he fell the height that remained without inconvenience. He then clutched hold of Mervyn's collar, and, shaking him severely, swore that if he did not tell the truth instantly, he would dash him to pieces.

"Do what you will, villains, I have no means to resist

you," said Mervyn, doggedly; but, as he spoke, an idea occurred to him, and he added, "murder me if you will, but you cannot prevent Sir Edmundbury's escape. He knew too well the secrets of this house not to take my warning, and he leaped out of the balcony below into the river."

"Why, then, he must be drowned, for everybody knows Sir Edmund cannot swim," said Oates, with malicious exultation.

"Say, rather, dashed to pieces, man, for it is low water," said Blood, gloomily. "At any rate, we will go and examine; but if he is dead, his blood be on his own obstinate old iron skull-piece, and the young fool that persuaded him."

He then, considerably to Mervyn's surprise, who had hoped they could find only ingress by the well, moved directly to the trap-door, and after casting a diligent look below, proposed to descend. He had some difficulty, however, in thrusting his bulky body in; and that accomplished, with many bitter curses at the lean old miser who had planned it, he still seemed afraid to venture in the dark, and took the lamp from Bedlow. That worthy also followed with Oates, who showed considerable reluctance, which was only overcome by a greater dread of rousing Blood's wrath. Mervyn followed, believing he should thereby show less apprehension, and crossed the apartment to the open balcony, without daring to cast a glance at the bed.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE FIRST VICTIM OF THE POPISH PLOT

Mervyn found the colonel hanging over the balustrade, and throwing the light of his torch as far as possible down the river, as if to break the shadows, and perhaps expecting to behold the old man's mangled body. The moon shone through a white mist, and showed nothing clearly; but Mervyn saw that it was ebb-tide, and that nought was visible below but the green slimy foundations of the house, and wavy mud strewed with weeds and rubbish. A careful

survey soon convinced Blood that the object he expected was not there, and he returned to his former opinion.

Accordingly, the assassins resumed their search, and, at Oates's suggestion, in the miser's chamber.

During the rigid examination which ensued — and they looked under the bed, on the framework, up the chimney, in all the nooks and crannies of the ancient chamber— Mervyn suffered the extreme agonies of fear and suspense. With admirable nerve, however, he showed no emotion, uttered no word, which might by any chance direct them in their search. By a curious neglect, which yet frequently happens in similar cases of hurried research, Blood and his accomplices forgot to look in the bed ; and Godfrey lay so flat and motionless, and the bed seemed so undisturbed, that no one thought of examining it.

" He is not here, at all events," said Blood, at last, throwing himself into a chair. " He has escaped, though I cannot divine how."

" Why, if you think he has escaped, colonel," said Oates, in evident terror, " I think we had better escape too. There is nothing for us but flight, for on the least peril our party will disavow us, and send us to the gallows to prove their own innocence."

" Thou art ever for keeping the rascal in those villanous ill-shaped limbs of thine," said Blood, bitterly ; " but that is not the way that men of honour and courage get out of their difficulties. So then, Master Mervyn, this ancient gentleman has escaped by your connivance ? Ha, what is here ? So ! the saint has left his Bible behind him." And he raised the volume which we have already mentioned, and, after a moment's examination, handed it to Oates.

" Well, he hath left it behind him," said Mervyn, as the colonel's eye again fell upon him ; " and if you were wise, Blood, you would join in my thanksgiving, for you are thereby saved from blood-guiltiness, and the direful everlasting punishment denounced by Heaven against murderers."

The colonel's face flushed a deep crimson, and he muttered something which no one distinctly heard ; but he added, in a milder tone, " And, prithee, what hast thou revealed to the old scarecrow, most sapient sir ? "

" Nothing but what was necessary to make him understand his danger and fly from it," replied Mervyn.

"What is to be done, colonel?" faltered Oates. "By this time, if ever, the old man will be at home, and about dispatching his musketeers to seize us for gallows-fruit. What must we do?"

"Anything but run away, Oates," replied Blood, scornfully. "Let us all be firm, and we can easily outface the mad old greybeard. Courage, Titus. Dost thou pretend to raise the devil, and run away at a whisk of his tail?"

"I cannot think he has got out of the house," said Bedlow.

"Nor I," said Blood. "Come, gentlemen, let us search the mansion, the cellar, the boy's hammock—everywhere."

This command seemed to remove a mountain of lead from Mervyn's heart, and he followed the clumsy ascent of Oates with indescribable satisfaction. Still he could scarcely believe in this extraordinary escape until Blood himself, last of the band, sprang out of the loft and secured the trap-door after him. The ruffians then proceeded on a deliberate ransacking of the house, poking with their swords into every hole and corner that might by possibility afford a hiding-place, Mervyn awaiting the result in the Painted Chamber, every sound causing him to shake like an aspen. Nearly an hour had passed in this manner, and his palpitating nerves were beginning to calm down, when suddenly he heard a dismal shriek, or rather yell, which he knew at once to be in Godfrey's tones. At the same moment he heard a rush upstairs, and Blood ran past with two or three of his confederates, shouting, "There he is! whoop, whoop!"

Mervyn's hair actually bristled on his head, and in an instant—he knew no more how than in a wild dream—he found himself in the haunted chamber. A horrible spectacle awaited him. Blood was already grasping Sir Edmundbury's shoulder, who was sitting upright in the bed, ghastly pale, his eyes nearly out of his head, his hands clasped, his whole frame convulsed as if in an ague-fit, shouting and yelling at the top of his voice.

"He is my prisoner. Sir Edmund, yield, since you have no resource, and no harm shall be done to you."

"Keep him off! keep him off!" yelled Godfrey, making no resistance, nor sign of resistance, as if unconscious of the colonel's presence, and pointing forward into vacant air. "Keep him off! Oh, in mercy's name, let him not

clutch me with those long lean hands!" sobbed Godfrey, whose voice was now almost inarticulate.

"What the fiend does he see?" muttered Oates, drawing near to Blood.

"Do but look at him yonder, the lean old pale man, with his shrivelled limbs and cold glittering eyes," said Godfrey, sobbing exhaustedly. "Why dost thou grin and mouth at me? I did not do it, sir; 'tis not my crime, though my father slew you!"

"He is ripe for Bedlam; bind and gag him," said Blood, impatiently turning away.

Mervyn, in the confusion and horror of his mind, knew not what to do, and gazed in a stupid manner while Oates and Bedlow bound their victim, whose yells had now subsided into idiotic murmurs.

A slight pause followed, for it seemed impossible to get Sir Edmundbury out of the chamber, bound as he was hand and foot. At length Blood loosened the thongs, and ordered Godfrey to mount the stairs, Oates going first to receive him. The unfortunate prisoner mechanically obeyed, and the whole band followed, Mervyn being dragged along by Bedlow, in a state bordering on unconsciousness, and all proceeded to the water gate, Blood grasping his prisoner by the belt. Mervyn afterwards recollected that they crossed the mud on a plank, and found a boat moored on the edge of the water. All got into it, and, Bedlow and Oates seizing the oars, they shot out over the water, which was scarcely visible in the heavy mist.

The voyage seemed to Mervyn's bewildered fancy interminably long, and all the while not a word was spoken. Godfrey seemed to sit in a state of stupefaction, but Mervyn thought there was something in his lack-lustre eyes which seemed to reproach him. On a sudden the boat grounded on a sloping jetty, and looking up, Mervyn saw piles of dim and lofty architecture towering in the ghostly mistiness of the moonlight. An exclamation from the colonel informed him that it was Somerset House, then the residence of the Queen and her popish court, as it was styled by the populace.

Oates gave a low whistle as they landed; a gate instantly opened on the left, and a man appeared with a dark lantern and a bunch of keys. Mervyn now concluded that his senses were totally disordered, for he thought he recognised

in the pale suspicious features of the person who appeared, Prance, the silversmith. Whoever he might be, he started back in great alarm, but was instantly seized by Blood.

"On your life stir not, booby! a pistol is at your head," said the colonel. "You have nothing to do but show us Gadden's apartment; all we do is by the duke's order."

"But—but—I—I never heard of this!" exclaimed the man, gazing with terror at Sir Edmundbury, "and—and—if there is to be bloodshed, I can't bear to look at it—I can't. I could never endure to see a calf killed, though my father was a butcher—I can't."

"Why, fool! thou wilt be present some day at thine own death," muttered Blood. "But there is no killing in the case. Hast the key of Gadden's rooms? speak!—lead the way—this instant!"

The man made no further demur, but admitted the whole party into a narrow terraced garden before the palace, Godfrey mechanically obeying every direction of his captors. They entered the palace by a court arched around, at the end of which they passed a sentinel, and entered another narrow court surrounded by lofty towers. Sir Edmundbury had hitherto behaved with perfect passiveness, as if unconscious of what was happening, though Mervyn fancied once or twice, from the expression of his eye, that his reason was returning. Unluckily, at the moment they entered the archway, Godfrey caught an indistinct view of the sentinel, and the hope of liberation probably flashed upon him. He, Blood, and Oates were some yards in advance of Mervyn and Bedlow, when the former beheld him suddenly wrench himself by a desperate effort from their grasp, and shouting, "Help, murther, help!" attempt to draw his sword.

All that followed long afterwards appeared to Mervyn like the phantasmagoria of some hideous dream. He saw Blood strike Sir Edmundbury with a bludgeon, who reeled back, still yelling for assistance, and shouting that he knew them—calling them by their names. He then heard Oates exclaim, "Down with him—he knows us!" and all four rushed upon him, and the unhappy man fell struggling, with one deep suffocated yell. Mervyn attempted to spring forward, but he was seized by his guard—he tried to shriek murder! but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. After this he recollected seeing Oates kneeling

on Sir Edmundbury's breast, who was struggling violently, and then Blood hit him another blow on the head, while Bedlow and the two watermen tugged at each end of the victim's cravat. Some faint remembrance he had of Prance wringing his hands and moaning, near the assassins —and then there was a faint choking gurgle—but Mervyn saw no more, for he fell senseless on the pavement.

CHAPTER XXX

CONSCIENCE AND POLITICS

Mervyn's first dawn of recollection was accompanied by a sensation of extreme cold, and raising himself on his elbows, he saw that he was in a boat rowed by two of the masks, whom with a deadly sickness of heart he recognised as Oates and Blood. After this he lay for some time in a state of dreamy stupor, during which the assassins discoursed, but he distinguished no sounds save a continued whisper. At last he was conscious that Blood lifted him in his arms, and carried him up a flight of steps, and then his recollection faded away, until suddenly he found himself lying on a heap of straw. Something he afterwards remembered, of a hideous, shrivelled old man, with a long, grey beard who held a sponge to his nose and felt his pulse. But the shock which he had sustained again overpowered his young strength, and he relapsed into insensibility. To this succeeded a wild and troubled sleep, haunted by dreams of unsurpassable horror, and which lasted he knew not how long; but finally he awoke with a start, imagining himself sinking into a deep gulf of the ocean, with a roar of winds and whirling waves heaping upon him.

This terrible fancy was succeeded by faint glimpses of memory, and the events which he had witnessed rushed in confused masses to his mind's eye. At first he thought he was but recollecting a dream of singular horror; but the reality of all that had happened rushed overpoweringly upon him, when he suddenly caught the tone of Oates's voice in a murmuring discourse, which was going on for some time before he took any distinct notice of it. He

raised his swimming head, and gazing intently round, perceived that he was in the Painted Chamber, on the colonel's bed, or rather lair. At the opposite side of the chamber, near a bright fire, sat that person, engaged in conversation with Oates. The first words he distinguished clearly took the form of a muttered curse from Blood, followed by a short pause, and then a question which Mervyn instantly understood to relate to the Earl of Shaftesbury.

"Oh, it is of no use—old Aldersgate won't bite," replied Oates. "I tried him every way, short of a direct confession. But it is in vain to think of coaxing a serpent into a net; he is too cautious to enter where there is a smell of blood. When I answered his inquiry how old Bentback was stowed, he would not understand my muffled hints, but cuts me short with a declaration, that if he thought we had hurt a hair of his head, he would have us all discovered, and sling us on the gallows like so many onions in a market bunch."

"Old Aldersgate were like enough to do that," said Blood, quietly. "He is of that godly school of villany which, when it hath wrought the deed, flings away the instrument abhorrently. He will be glad of an excuse to be rid of us, Master Oates."

"Yet he hath an open hand, this prince in Israel," replied the doctor. "Look you here. He would understand no further but that we had captured the old beak; and for that small service he counts me down forty French pistoles. I saw, though, that he was deadly pale, as if he understood me but too well, and the thoughtless Duke of Monmouth, who was there, laughed heartily, and gave me this curious chased ring. And then he said he supposed the old gentleman was hungry by this time, and so it would be but common *politesse* to write an account of his afflicting situation to my Lord Danby, accusing the Duke of York, and pointing out where the old victim might be found."

"Anonymously, of course?" said Blood, and Oates nodded his head.

"Ay; but under existing circumstances that will not do," exclaimed the colonel, in his usual unconcerned tone. "I am certain the earl will shrink out of this business, and he is sufficiently versed in the tricks of justice to betray you, Oates, without implicating himself. Besides, a murderer's shoes are always red, and leave traces which sooner or later set the hounds of the law on his track."

"Prithee, master colonel," said Oates, hastily, "have the goodness to recollect that you are as deep in the mud as I am in the mire."

"Why, villain, you dare not pretend that I took any part in the actual murder? that I had any idea of *that* when I undertook the job?" exclaimed Blood, fiercely.

"And had I?" said Oates, in a low and very meek tone.

"But who held the poor old man, I should like to know?" continued the colonel, in his raised voice. "Who wrung his neck like a barn-door fowl's, Master Oates?"

"And who aided and abetted? Who stunned the old gentleman with a blow enough to fell an ox, colonel?" retorted Titus. "Not that I blame you for it, for the whole ploat, the saulvation of this country and our blessed reformed religion, depended on it."

"Don't sicken me with this murderous cant, Oates," interrupted the colonel. "Well, I grant you that we did it all with the best intentions—so let them go to pave our way in the other world. At present our business is to cheat the devil. We must make the politic earl himself believe that the papists have really slain the stiff old carl—or at least give him a pretext for feigning so."

"But how?" exclaimed the doctor—"how?"

"Why, you know that Godfrey is now apparently in the custody of the popish party, in Gadden's chamber," replied the colonel, musingly. "That fool, Prance, believes us employed by York—his disguised servants, in fact. Oates, we must remove the body to some ditch in the fields, and leave it there, for chance, in the shape of a dog or a cow, to discover."

"But will not our cunning be too paulpable? Shall we not be betrayed by some finger in the dark pointing at us?" said Oates, shuddering.

"I oft do marvel how so great a coward as thou art became so matchless a villain!" exclaimed Blood. "But so it is! Why, man, we will take such precautions that at the great day, the whole world shall stand amazed to hear we did it!—We will leave him in the fields at St. Pancras, with his sword through his body, as if the papists wished men to think he did it with his own hand; but the ring round his neck will contradict that, and so fix the guilt on them. Prance must be made to confess, and we will bolster his evidence as we see occasion."

"'Tis a perilous game, but it must be played out," groaned Oates. "But oh, good lack! how it did shake my soul to hear the people, all Sunday, forming in groups, and wondering at Godfrey's absence. Shaftesbury's men were busy at all the coffee-houses and places of public resort. I heard the reason of his absence reported in a thousand different ways. But the papists are preparing for the worst, and go about wagering that Godfrey hath committed suicide, being so sad and blackbiled to look at. 'Tis marvellous convenient to call murdered men suicides. Eh, Blood?"

"You may some day find it so," replied the colonel, coldly. "For you are no favourite with some who know where to find crafty and strong arms to avenge them."

"Nay, but what *we* did was in self-defence," said Oates, changing his jesting tone. "It was no fault of ours. Since he knew us, we had no alternative, in self-preservation. You know the proverb?"

"You have not been among the Jesuits for nothing, Oates," replied Blood. "But at present we have other business in hand than splitting the fine hairs of casuistry. You must set your former engine at work—your foolish Eve! But how know ye but, on comparing notes with her husband, she may not suspect your share in the adventure?"

"I have provided for that," said Titus, with a grim smile. "I have upbraided her with not making her husband keep his appointment, pretending that I went at twelve, as we had agreed; but, you know, we did not arrive till two. I found the woman in such a panic that she scarcely could speak, but sat crying all the time, whereby I concluded that distracted Prance has made her his confidante, and that neither suspects the truth. You must employ your alchemist again, Blood, to counterfeit the duke's hand, in a letter to this Prance, telling him to be in readiness to remove the body, aided by certain masks as before. Let him have a sedan waiting at Somerset House till we arrive, and, depend on't, all will be done well and quickly."

"'Tis but trying, at all events," said Blood, drily.

"But, Colonel Blood," resumed Oates, with visible hesitation, "we are brothers in danger, you know—and concerning that boy," he added, sinking his voice so that only the most intense hearing could have distinguished what he said:

"the truth is, colonel, he knows too much—he must *vanish*!"

"Nonsense, brother wolf!" exclaimed the colonel, sharply. "The poor child is delirious, and when he recovers we can easily persuade him that all this has been but a wild fever-dream. At every hazard, Master Oates, I will not have him hurt, not even so far as pricking in the little finger goes. He is valuable—even dear to me—and I have blood enough of his already fuming in the nostrils of Heaven."

"Well, well, he is very silent, perhaps he is dead," said Oates, rising and coming towards Mervyn's bed. "Let us see."

Mervyn had presence of mind to sink his head on the pillow, and feign a heavy slumber, as the villain approached. He was then conscious that Oates's gaze was fixed upon him; that he scanned his features with a torch, and he felt by no means sure that the villain would not take the opportunity to cut his throat. He therefore feigned to be disturbed, and Oates withdrew softly on tiptoe.

"How troubled-like he sleeps!" he heard him mutter to Blood. "I hope the fever is not contagious; but I do feel mighty sick. Let us have some mulled sack, Blood; 'tis cheerful and——"

He broke off suddenly, for a loud knock was heard in the corridor by which Blood usually made his exits. Both started, and Oates turned deadly pale. "God's mercy! what if it should be old Godfrey's ghost?" exclaimed he, clutching Blood by the belt.

"Off, dastard! keep thy villanous hands from me," said the colonel, springing up. "'Tis much likelier that Shaftesbury hath played us a shrewd turn. I'll up and reconnoitre; at all events, they shall not take me alive, to bait like a bear."

And, seizing his pistols from the chimneypiece, Blood disappeared for a moment down his private staircase. Mervyn awaited the result of this espial with an emotion of which words are but faint exponents, and, carefully as he strove to conceal it, he could not refrain from giving a glance at the affrighted countenance of Oates. But hope vanished when Blood, re-entering, informed Oates, in a grumbling tone, that it was Claude Duval, half drunk, and with a knapsack of provisions on his shoulder, doubtless

on a visit. He then took up a ring of keys, and went out to admit him.

In a few moments Mervyn heard a voice merrily singing the burden of a jolly French hunting-song, and replying to Blood's questions in that manner all the way up. But as they entered Claude ceased.

"What a plaguy gabble the man keeps up!" he exclaimed. "As if Claude Duval were like the honest men of the world, and turned his back on a brother in distress. Why, man, I have brought you some small additions to your larder, and two or three pottles of aqua vitæ, to keep your nose warm. *Mais vogue la galère!* what manner of a companion have we here?"

"A poor labourer in the vineyard," replied Oates, with his habitual hypocrisy of tone.

"No mummery, Oates; we are jolly friars well met," said the colonel, eyeing his visitor with a suspicious gaze. "But are you sure, Claude, you come here on no other errand?"

"Nay, I am sure to the contrary," replied Duval, cheerfully. "But 'tis not to ferret you out, old fox, for the Ormonde dogs, as your eye hints. I want to see your nephew, for I have taken a sort of liking for him, and would do him good."

"Indeed? but my nephew is too ill to hold much converse at present," said Blood. "His too high and riotous living hath made the schoolboy sick. He was three sheets in the wind last night, and scarce knows a dog from a ditch to-day."

"Where is he, then? What! stretched on that straw?" said Claude, advancing to the bed; and the colonel instantly followed.

There was a lightning rush of thought through Mervyn's brain, profoundly asleep as he pretended to be. He felt an involuntary trust in the kindly nature of the highwayman, and half inclined to spring up and claim his protection from this den of murderers. But the certainty that the colonel and Oates would never accede to such an arrangement, and that in all probability they would extend their principle of self-preservation in his favour, deterred him. Then the question as to what right he had to confide in a man of Duval's character and pursuits occurred with heavy force, and that ray of hope also vanished.

The highwayman approached his bed, and after gazing for some moments intently at him, Mervyn heard him heave a deep sigh. "How like he is, with that fair flushed countenance," he muttered, and, taking the boy's hand, he bent anxiously over him. Mervyn felt a hot tear fall on his face, and affecting to start, he roused himself, and gave a vacant stare at Claude. Blood spoke to him, and inquired if he knew the gentleman. He turned his head, muttered some incoherent observation, and feigned to drop asleep again. Duval returned to the fire, and, putting his hamper down, observed that the sight of the poor lad had taken away his appetite, and that, since the colonel had company, he would away to some friends who expected him.

"There is to be a ransacking of some wool-staplers from Manchester, and we meet at the Angel," he added carelessly. "If I make anything worth while, colonel, I shall bring some little present to your nephew; though, to deal frankly with you, I think he hath not the honour of such relationship."

"What if he be my son?" said Blood, gloomily.

"He hath not thy rascally look," replied Claude, laughing. "But I would speak a few words with him, if he comes from France—*ma belle, belle France!* Whence is he—know you, Master Oates? From St. Omer?"

"No, in sooth, though I was there for many a perilous day," replied Oates.

Mervyn felt a strong inclination to give him the lie, but he suppressed it, and listened to what followed with the curiosity naturally excited by this conjecture. Claude, however, stood for some minutes musing, and then observing that he must be at Islington within the hour, took his hat to go.

"And pray, sir, since you are from the city," said Oates, clearing his throat with an effort, "pray, sir, has any news been heard of Sir Edmundbury Godfrey?"

"Oh, yes, he is found," said Claude, eagerly, and both gentlemen started.

"Where, where?" gasped Oates.

"Why, the cunning old fellow has married a lady of great fortune, and has gone off with her. The Duke of Norfolk hurried post to court, and told it publicly to the King, for there were pratings that Godfrey was last

seen near his grace's house in the Strand," replied Claude.

"Is it possible? he! he! he!—married a bride! Is she young and handsome?" ejaculated Oates, giggling and winking at Blood.

"Why, sir, do you doubt my word?" said Claude, sharply. "But I know full well what your faction hopes—that it will turn out a murder, and so they may have a pretext to stir up the populace to a general Catholic massacre."

"Well, well, sir, I dispute not the duke's intelligence," said Oates, chucklingly; "it would ill become me, that have been one of his chaplains in ordinary; but it will be seen what will be seen."

"Well, well, I leave you in godly company, colonel," said Claude, going; but he again turned, and added, "I had to tell thee, too, Blood, that I have altered my resolution about that plot of yours; I'll have nothing to do with it. The heath, a swift horse, and pistols for me! Claude Duval can use the sword, but not the knife. Fie! 'tis an old man with grey hairs, and I'll nought with him."

"As you will, sir," replied the colonel. "But remember you throw away the most splendid prize that ever was offered to mortal thief."

"I am no thief, sir—I am a robber!" said Claude, haughtily. "But, farewell: you follow your trade, and I mine. I will come again to-morrow, and see your nephew."

Blood smiled bitterly, and cautiously shading the lamp, lighted Claude down the staircase. As he went out he glanced at the bed, and Mervyn's eye met his with an expression which obviously startled him. He made a hesitating movement back, but Mervyn closed his eyes, and Blood, calling from the foot of the stairs, obliged him to follow.

The colonel returned almost instantly, and put down his keys with a grin of satisfaction. "Claude thinks to pump my nephew, as he calls him," he observed, in answer to some mutter of Oates. "But by Jove, if ever they meet again, it shall be under correction of my bludgeon."

"Good Loard! how I shook in my shoes all the time he was here!" said Oates: "a word might disclose all—ruin everything."

"Well, we must see about our tasks. I must go to the Heaven for ink and a crow-quill, and find Elkanah," said

the colonel. "But tarry—you have them hanging at your girdle, like a scholar as you are."

"Ay, ay, but will it be safe to leave this crafty young kid here by himself?" said Oates. "Who knows but what he may be playing us a false game?"

"Oh, I'll lock him up so that a fly can't escape," replied Blood. "And if he did escape, it were only out of the frying-pan into the fire."

This last intimation that he was to be left alone in the house made Mervyn's heart palpitate, for he was determined, though it cost him his life, to escape from the clutches of these wretches.

The colonel and his guest continued in close conference for a length of time which seemed intolerable to Mervyn; but at last they came to an end, and as it was almost night, began to cloak and mask for the adventure, and at last departed.

Fearful, nevertheless, of an abrupt return, Mervyn lay for a considerable time without moving. Hearing no sound, however, but the sinking of the burning wood, he ventured, at last, to lift himself up and listen. The profound silence of all around appalled him. The room was dark, excepting the red gleam of the embers, and such a mass of dreadful recollections came upon him when he saw the spot on which Godfrey had sat, that for some time his brain whirled about in eddies. This cleared away, and it seemed to him as if he heard a voice, he knew not whence, exhorting him to fly, and bring the murderers to justice. He arose staggering, for he was almost too weak to stand, and after a fervent ejaculation to Heaven, looked around for his clothes. But Blood had removed them altogether. The Painted Chamber, as we have said, was lighted only by the uncertain flashes of a wood fire, and the ruddy twilight which it made allowed ample scope for the wild sketches of fancy. Strange and gloomy thoughts crowded on his memory. The dark legends of this accursed mansion arose to his recollection, clothed in a bodily and dramatic form. The terrific punishment of the parricide, even in his children's blood, occurred to him with indescribable horror. A supernatural judgment seemed present, and the vengeance of Heaven itself appeared to haunt the ruins of the detestable mansion. Mervyn felt as if by staying in it he must share its blasting dispensation, and he rose on

his shaking limbs, and without clothes, money, and friends in the vast world, he swore solemnly rather to die than to remain in that house. Even as he took this oath, he perceived a corner of the mantle he had worn at Godfrey's hanging from a rent in the tapestry, and searching it, he found all his garments of the previous day.

Mervyn debated a few minutes as to the means of accomplishing his enterprise, and finally determined on what was indeed the only chance—to attempt an escape from the balcony. His horror at the thought of entering that dreadful chamber nearly choked this resolution, but he was desperate, and resolved to vanquish his repugnance. He strode resolutely to the door, into the corridor, and, after listening a moment and taking a survey of the gloomy galleries around, ventured to set his foot on the stairs. A superstitious feeling again overpowered him, and he stood for some minutes gazing without the courage to ascend the ruinous flight, down which streamed a dull and melancholy moonlight. At last, rallying with a strong effort, he ran upstairs, and leaped breathlessly into the loft. He groped his way to the trap-door, and found it only by the vacancy, for the room below was black as night.

It was with an indescribable thrill of horror that Mervyn found himself once more alone in this dreadful chamber. He dared not even glance at the bed, for a horrible fancy haunted him that two lean old men, both black in the face, were watching his every movement. He paused on reaching the floor, and listened intently. There was a sepulchral silence, but suddenly he thought he heard a deep sigh, or rather groan. His hair actually bristled on his head, and for some moments he stood immovable ; but, listening on, the hollow sweep of the wind, which was very high, reassured him, and he hastily concluded that the sound he had heard was from the same cause. He made a movement towards the door, which he now perceived was fastened with a padlock ; but another deep groan—no longer to be confounded by possibility with the wind—smote his ear. Driven to the verge of madness, and utterly desperate, he turned towards the bed, and, with cracking eyeballs, saw that the mouldering quilt stirred. Horror would, doubtless, have utterly overthrown his reason had he not at the same dreadful moment caught sight of a countenance glaring at him, and heard a hollow laugh that was familiar to him.

A moment's flash of vision and thought convinced him it was Blood concealed in the miser's bed, and that he had taken this cunning means of discovering whether his insensibility was real or feigned.

"So, my young master, all's right, you see; only it's a dead failure," exclaimed the colonel, rising in his couch and laughing heartily.

Mervyn took his resolution instantly, and, with extraordinary dexterity in one so young, he affected not to perceive Blood nor to notice his laughter, but set his lamp deliberately on the floor, and, kneeling before a massive cabinet in the chamber, he began wafting his light, as if it were a censer before the altar. He then sung a Latin vesper hymn in a sweet calm voice, as when an acolyte at St. Omer he was wont to chant in the choir, and was the admiration of all for his excellent melody. As he sang Blood gazed with long and intense surprise, and, getting softly out of bed, moved on tiptoe towards him. Mervyn heard him mutter, "The poor child is delirious," and he burst into tears.

Blood called him softly by name, and Mervyn, affecting to start, exclaimed, "Yes, father; but, indeed, I cannot sing better."

"Father!" muttered the colonel, and assuming a voice which he thought might suit a brother at St. Omer, whither he imagined the boy's delirious fancy had wandered. "My son," he said, "I do not wish you to sing better; you sing like an angel. But go to bed again. Alas, poor child! how hot his skin is."

Afraid that he might overact his part, Mervyn suffered himself to be led passively back to his bed in the Painted Chamber, and the colonel sat down beside him. He continued singing little snatches of sacred melodies for some time, and not without effect; for, glancing once at Blood, he perceived that his eyes were full of tears! It might be that milder associations of early youth and innocence came over his rugged heart, and touched it, seared as it was by so many years of bloodshed and violence. At last the youth feigned to drop asleep, hoping or conscious that his watcher would be obliged to depart on his dire task; and so it happened—a distant bell struck nine, and seemed to summon him. He arose, wrapped Mervyn up with a mother's care, and, as if apprehensive that he might be afraid if he

awoke in the dark, trimmed a lamp and set it on the table. He even put some cooling drink within reach, and after putting fuel on the fire, departed.

CHAPTER XXXI

ALGERNON SYDNEY AND HIS DAUGHTER

This time Mervyn listened to the retreating steps of his custodian with intense anxiety. He heard the doors slam after him, and the bolts drawn ; but so great was his dread that he continued to listen till St. Paul's struck ten. He then ventured to get up, and desperate with the circumstances which hemmed him in, no longer paused or hesitated. In a moment he was in the Haunted Chamber, but he gazed fearlessly around, sprang to the door, and attempted to open it—in vain. A moment's inspection showed him that Blood had secured it by a padlock, the key of which he had taken with him.

Mervyn was discouraged but not subdued. He attempted the windows, and finding that they would not open, and if open, were secured by cross-bars outside, he tried to force the door with a wooden stake. But in vain did he exhaust his youthful strength in the attempt: the fastenings, contrived by a miser, were impenetrable.

At last, overcome with fatigue and disappointment, he sat down to rest, and began reflecting that even if he were on the balcony, it would endanger his life to drop into the river, supposing it at full tide, yet this was his only hope. Then again the horror of remaining in such a den of murderers reanimated him. He knew he was a good swimmer, and believed that Heaven itself would aid him in so righteous an attempt ; and, as if by inspiration, the recollection of the trap-door in the loft occurred to him. Once on the roof, he thought it might be possible to scramble down to the balcony, which was only a storey below. Apprehensions of his jailer's return, for it struck twelve o'clock as he listened, contributed to stimulate his exertions, and he made his way again to the loft.

After two or three ineffectual leaps, he managed to swing

himself up to the cross-beams, and imitating the means which Blood had taken, thrust himself from beam to beam, until he reached the trap-door in the roof. The bolt was, however, so firmly in, and fixed by thirty years of rust, that he actually pulled off bolt and staples without being able to undo it. Then rallying all his strength, he forced the door back on its grooves, and with indescribable joy beheld the starry sky, and the bright moon sailing serenely in its blue depths. Groping himself up, he knew not by what means, he swung out on the roof.

After the first ecstatic feeling of delight, he looked carefully round. He found himself on the projection of the high gabled roof; behind him the slooping roof and haggard map of Alsatia; before him the river, tossing snowingly under a high wind and a bright moonlight. On this side the balcony must needs be, and he crawled on his hands and knees along the gable, to ascertain how far below it might be. To his great surprise and disappointment, he perceived that it was much lower than he had calculated, and that it was impossible to leap the distance without imminent risk of breaking his neck.

The fresh air and the prospect of liberty had, however, wonderfully reanimated him. He resolved to return and get some of the clothing of the miser's bed, and make a rope by which he might let himself down. He was now insensible to all supernatural fears; he ran down with the utmost speed, and tore off the quilt. He had some difficulty in dragging it up after him, but succeeded at last, and ran to the Painted Chamber for a knife, and laden with these treasures, soon found his way to the roof again.

He now tore three broad strips the whole length of the quilt, and, though it seemed very rotten, by twisting and knotting it at intervals, he thought it would be firm enough to bear his weight. Time passed rapidly during this operation, and it was with a throb of the heart that he heard the bells of various churches tolling one o'clock in a solemn and melancholy murmur over the waters. He began to calculate the probability of his enemies' return, and felt that there was no time to be lost. Without pausing to finish the rope so carefully as he could have wished, he looked around for something to fasten it to, and with extreme vexation perceived that there was nothing. But in the course of the sorrowful survey which terminated in

this conviction, his eye chanced on the open trap-door, and he instantly determined to fasten his rope to it. This he accomplished as strongly as he was able, having first tried the hinges of the trap-door, and found them sufficiently firm for the purpose. He then threw the rope over with a log of wood fastened to the end, and crawled to the verge of the gable. On looking down he saw that the log swung at some distance from the floor of the balcony, but calculating that he should easily drop the remainder, he prepared to swing himself over the gable. There was considerable danger that at the first shock some part of his frail apparatus might give way, and precipitate him on or over the balustrade below; but Mervyn resolved not to calculate those dreadful probabilities. Murmuring a short commendation of his soul to its Giver, he stepped over the projection, grasping his rope, and with a sensation to which no words can do the faintest justice, he found himself dangling in the air over that terrible height.

The presence of mind, skill, and caution which extreme danger excites in brave natures did not desert our young adventurer at this terrible pass. He let himself softly down from notch to notch, carefully avoiding all occasion for a jerk, for he now perceived that his frail cordage would give way against the sharp edge of the gable if the strain were directed on any point but the centre. Water poured down his face, and he felt every moment as if inclined to rush upon the worst, to end the agony of mind which he suffered in fearing it. The terror of his position, however, decreased as he continued to descend, and when he found himself about midway he began to feel more tranquil and collected. This emotion in its turn yielded to one of unbounded joy when at length he felt the log of wood beneath his feet, and for the first time he ventured to look down.

Another difficulty now assailed him. The height which remained was considerably greater than he had imagined, being nearly twelve feet, but an expedient offered itself to his quick imagination. He suffered himself to glide gradually down till his body hung its full length, holding the log with both hands. But even then he hesitated, for his feet were without defence, and he feared he might fall in such a manner as to break some limb, which would put a stop to his proceedings. An accident saved him the terrible necessity of deciding; the log broke off, and he

fell to the balcony with no other injury than a severe twist of his right ankle and a bruise from the balustrade.

His heaviest danger was, however, yet to come, and so Mervyn thought as he gazed over the balcony upon the river below. It was full tide, on which all his hopes depended; but the water was rough and driven by a violent breeze, so that on calculating the depth he must fall, his own weakness, and the tide's strength, Mervyn thought it was hardly possible he could reach the opposite shore.

The Surrey shore was not then, as now, a series of vast warehouses, shipyards, foundries, and docks, where commerce parades her cranes and mighty implements of industry. It was a low flat shore covered with reeds and willowy pastures, and diversified by a few straggling villages and farmhouses. On the London side, however, the city had extended itself as far as the eye could reach on either hand, and black shadows and strange beetling lights weltered on the dark waves wherever the moonlight did not shine. Mervyn distinctly perceived the four pinnacles of the Tower on his left; and far to his right, beyond the terraced gardens of the Temple, he recognised the white masses of Somerset House, which seemed brightly illuminated as if for some festival.

Gazing over this scene in a fit of despondency, he saw at a considerable distance down the river a small but very beautiful little barge, such as were used by the citizens for pleasure at a time when the Thames, like the lagoons of Venice, was the favourite highway of its dwellers. It was visible by several torches carried by men in livery seated in the barge, and Mervyn thought he could discern a female figure at the boathead, near a gentleman in some sad-coloured vestments. From the course the boat was taking Mervyn had little doubt that it would sail midway between Alsatia and Surrey, and that it probably contained a party going to some midnight revelry at Somerset House, where the Queen of Charles II. resided. He thought that if he could but summon sufficient strength to reach the barge, compassion would induce the persons in it to receive him on board. His resolution was soon taken, and he continued to watch the little bark, as it rapidly bounded on before the tide, with an emotion of the most intense anxiety. Nearer and nearer it came, and he began to prepare for his terrible

leap by clambering up the balustrade and standing on its rotten verge, grasping one of the pillars.

Whilst thus intently watching this uncertain star of hope, as it came glimmering over the waters, the dreary contrast presented by that world in which he had longed to launch as on a sea of love and pleasure, sunk heavily into his heart. An orphan, alone, unloved, unprotected, he stood there in that pass of extreme danger, while full of mirth, at perfect ease and safety, the revellers of life rowed past! He had not, however, much time to indulge in these sad cogitations, for while he stood hesitating, and the boat came nearer, he heard, he thought he heard, a sound of unbarring in the miser's apartment behind. Listening with his hair on end, he distinctly heard Blood's tremendous voice, and then Oates's whine! Light flashed through the barred windows —his jailers had returned from their horrible work! Still he hesitated—every muscle stiffened with fear. Repeated blows were given at the door of the balcony, as if the person who knocked were too impatient to wait to unlock it. At the same instant Mervyn heard a shout from above, and glancing up, he saw the diabolical face of Oates lowring at him from the gable-end, his right hand levelling a pistol at his head. With a wild shriek on Heaven for aid, he leapt—and the report of the pistol, accompanied by a shout of triumph from the wretch who fired it, were simultaneous.

The shot, however, whizzed over his head, and in an instant Mervyn dashed with extreme violence into the waves, sunk to their oozy depths, and rose again with a supernatural effort. The cold waters seemed to strike a pleasant chill into his burning frame, and his strength returned wonderfully, and seemed to surpass that of a young steed. Torches gleamed from the balcony above, yells rung in his ear, and conscious of the danger he ran if observed, he dived deep in the waves, and only rose beyond the circle of light. His streaming gaze instantly discerned the barge advancing, but still at a considerable distance, and he strained towards it with every nerve and every muscle. He soon found, however, that his strength deserted him in his endeavour to combat that of the tide, and he was obliged to confine his efforts to keeping as much as possible in the line of the barge, and to uttering faint cries for help.

The boat was now approaching very fast, driven by the rapid wave and strong wind, and Mervyn's powers were so exhausted that he could merely float like a log of wood. On a sudden it seemed as if his last hope were leaving him; the barge shifted her course, and seemed to make for the Surrey shore. Rallying his energies to one last desperate effort, he shouted "Help! I am drowning!" and instantly it seemed as if the female face turned towards him, and in that excess of horror it appeared to him like that of an angel of mercy. He uttered another cry, and strove to breast the rushing waves with the last efforts of his exhaustion. At this instant the bargemen threw the blaze of their torches towards him, the female shrieked, and a manly voice shouted to him to keep up—that help was near. The barge turned suddenly towards him, and Mervyn felt all his energies revive within him. He buffeted the waves furiously back, neared the barge, and then of a sudden all his powers finally deserted him. It seemed to him, however, as if, when he was sinking amidst the rush and roar of the waves, the white hand of the angelic voyager grasped his—that something clutched his hair—and then sight, feeling, memory vanished, and he knew no more.

How long this state of insensibility lasted, and what occurred in it, Mervyn was totally ignorant; but his first recollection on reviving was that he lay for a considerable time in a kind of reverie, without uttering a word, and merely gazing at the rich hangings of a bed on which he was stretched. By degrees his memory brightened up, but at first the dreadful particulars of the scenes he had lately gone through occurred to him indistinctly, as if in a dream. At last, a clearer train of thought flowed through his perturbed brain, and he raised himself in the bed to ascertain where he was, for he could not reconcile his recollections of the colonel's accommodations with those he now enjoyed. He found himself in a very handsome room, hung with damask silk, and richly furnished. An old woman was sitting by his bedside, nodding over an open missal, and there was a snug fire burning in a grate before her. Mervyn was satisfied with this, he knew not why, and he lay down, and after amusing himself for some time in vacantly watching the old woman's periodical nods of the head, a new train of recollections rushed upon him. The particulars of his escape, to the moment when he sunk

insensible into the waves, passed in vivid masses; and, unable to comprehend where he was, he took the liberty of disturbing the old woman's slumber. She woke with a start which sent her spectacles from a long, hooked nose, and rubbing her eyes, and uttering a thousand lackadaisies, she began wrapping the bedclothes, which he had deranged, as compactly round him as if on an Egyptian mummy.

"Bless your sweet eyes, child, for the sake of him you favour like two cherry-stones," she said, coaxingly. "And do go to sleep, darling, and don't ee speak, for the doctor ordered you not, under peril."

"But where am I, mother? For goodness' sake, tell me where I am, and who you are?" said Mervyn, faintly.

"Why, chuck, I am Mistress Sydney's nurse," replied the old woman; "my name is Alice Penryn, and I never served but in two places all my life, for as old as I am, which is a certificate few servants can take with them. The first time it was to the noble Aumerles—alack-a-day! I was nurse to the poor young earl that killed himself in the Tower, and I warrant me, treated more like his mother than his servant. Then, I had the nursing of his poor little——"

"But, mother, tell me where I am, and how I came here?" interrupted Mervyn.

"Nay, for the how, that's just what none of us can make out," said Alice. "But for the where—you are in Aumerle House, my Lord Howard's that is, woe the day!"

"Good Heaven! Lord Howard's! But how came I here?" said the bewildered patient.

"Nay, good sooth, were you not picked up two nights agone by the honourable Colonel Sydney, as he brought Mistress Aurora from the ball at Somerset House?" said the nurse. "But, poor soul! you became insensible as any stone when they lifted you out of the water, and Heaven knows it was nothing but superior goodness that kept you from drowning."

"And does the Lady Howard know—has she seen me? Did she not remember to have seen me before?" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Ay, faith, did she, and was so shocked at the sight, she clean perished away," replied the nurse. "But she would not let you be cared for out of the house, though I am sure, I wonder she dared look at you, child, you are so like—well, well, no matter."

"But who—who was that—what lady was that in the boat?" said Mervyn, his pallid face flushing with anxiety.

"Mercy! and who but dear, sweet, good Madam Aurora?" said the old woman, enthusiastically. "But I ought not to talk to you, darling, so go to sleep, or the doctor will be angry. To be sure it was Mistress Sydney, and she told me she stretched out her hand to save you, and you grasped it, and you would both have gone down, only her father clutched you by the hair, and drew her back."

"God for ever bless her!" exclaimed Mervyn, melting into tears; but darker recollections crowded upon him, and looking wildly at the nurse, he said, "But—but is Godfrey's body found?"

"Lord love us! he is raving again," groaned Alice. "I knew how it would be; Dr. Brooke told me not to talk with him on any account. Why, child, you have done nothing this two days but rave about Godfrey's murder; and poor, dear, precious man, he is found now sure enough. And folks say—more shame to 'em—murdered by us poor wretched Catholics that dare hardly call our heads our own."

"Where was he found?" gasped Mervyn.

"In a ditch in St. Pancras Fields, a good two miles from town," said Alice; "his silver-hilted sword stuck to the hilt through him, his neck broken, and all his guineas about him; so that it could not have been thieves that did it, though Claude Duval robbed the Earl of Harrington only the other day, in Piccadilly, by broad daylight."

"Could I see Colonel Sydney—for an instant?—my life depends on it!" said Mervyn, clasping his hands in eager supplication.

"By-and-bye he'll come and see you," replied the nurse, composedly. "He is just going to dine. There is a great feast given by my Lady Howard, and all the quality are there—the Duke of Monmouth, my Lord Shaftesbury, the Lord Russell and his lady, the——"

"Oh, as you have a soul to save, tell him to come to me—this moment, this very moment!" ejaculated the youth passionately. "There is murder—death—treason—I know not what! I cannot, I will not die with this load of horror on my soul!"

"Hush, for goodness' sake, darling, or they'll say I've

done it," said Alice. "And you know it was you made me talk—but good lack, here is Lady Aurora!"

The sweet, low, musical voice of a young girl was heard at that moment; the door half opened, and a form, which to Mervyn appeared that of an angel of light, glided softly in. It was a fair and very elegant girl, apparently very young; but her voice had the musical tenderness of intonation, and her form the delicate rounding and symmetry, which mark the period when the aërial graces of childhood vanish in the riper and richer beauty of womanhood. Her features were almost purely Grecian, her complexion was very fair, the cheeks and lips richly tinted, and a profusion of dark auburn hair fell in ringlets, as the fashion then was, round her fair face and neck. She might have sat to a painter, without any alteration, as the celestial Hebe, so fresh, gay, and full of rich and jocund life did she seem. There was a merriment, too, in her laughing eyes, a rosy sparkle in her smile, which seemed to characterise one of a vivacious and warm-hearted nature, and a nobility of expression in the repose of her perfect features. She was dressed very simply—in white, with a bunch of moss-roses in her bosom, and a circlet of opening buds entwined among her rich tresses.

"Well, nurse, how is he?—how is your patient?" was the question of the fair creature as she tripped lightly in, almost to the bed.

"Hush! he is in his senses again!" exclaimed Alice, as Mervyn raised himself suddenly on his pillow.

"I am better—well—blessed lady!" exclaimed Mervyn, regardless of everything but the dreadful thought which urged him on. "But, if you would complete your work, if you would save my soul from perdition, implore of Colonel Sydney but one moment, but one single moment, to hear what I would say to him!"

Mistress Sydney blushed a lively carnation, and looked in mute surprise at the nurse.

"Alack-a-daisy! he is raving again about Godfrey's murder," sighed the good old woman. "You need not call the colonel, honeykin; he can do no good."

"I swear to you, lady, I am in my perfect senses!" exclaimed Mervyn with startling vehemence. "But I have that upon my heart which will burst it if I may not give it utterance! I must be heard—I will be heard!"

"Ring for a valet, nurse—my father would marvel that

I—but who knows ? Perchance the poor youth hath something heavy on his mind ? " said Mistress Sydney, with some confusion. " Beseech you, sir, rest—my father shall visit you." And she disappeared, like a beam of light, from the gaze of the young sufferer.

Content with this promise, Mervyn suffered his aching head to sink on the pillow, and either slept or swooned away for some little time. He awoke or revived with a strong scent of violets in his nostrils, and opening his languid eyes, the first object they encountered was the darkly beautiful face of Lady Howard, who was administering restoratives, and bending over him, with her keen eyes fixed full on his. There was something in the expression of those eyes which sent an involuntary shudder through Mervyn's very marrow, and he raised himself with a faint ejaculation in the bed. Old Alice was standing beside the lady with a tray of cordials, her mouth puckered in, and her whole frame knit up with an expression of as much dislike as she dared show.

But Mervyn's eye was instantly caught by a figure on the opposite side of the bed. It was that of a gentleman, apparently past the meridian of life ; tall, and nobly formed ; his features large, dignified, and expressive,—the brows somewhat sternly curved, but the mouth and high-expanded forehead were remarkable for the intellectual mildness of their expression. The whole cast of his countenance was somewhat melancholy, even the glance of his deep blue, penetrating eyes. Contrary to the fashion of the day, he wore his own hair, which was still a dark unsilvered chestnut colour. It was parted high on his forehead, and fell in heavy curls on his shoulders, in the Raffaelesque style, which Milton and other Italian travellers of the day affected. There was nothing, however, of coxcombry in his appearance. His dress, though of rich materials, was of dark colours, without any of the fripperies of the time. It was principally of black velvet slashed with silver, and he wore a cravat and ruffled shirt of the finest lawn, as if in contempt of the effeminate court fashion of wearing lace collars of elaborate work. A silver sword and half-cloak of ash-grey velvet, with a hat plainly buckled, completed the garb of a man who, deist and republican as he might be, was undoubtedly one of the noblest specimens of the English gentleman that ever called the illustrious soil of England—mother.

Mervyn felt instinctively that this personage must be

Colonel Sydney, and his agitation was excessive. He attempted to speak, but failed, and could only grasp the hand which was extended to him, and bathe it in convulsive tears. Sydney addressed some soothing words to him, entreating him to be calm, and the Lady Howard seconded his efforts with her blandishing voice and expostulations.

"Be not alarmed, good youth," she said, caressingly. "You are out of all danger, and in noble keeping. But Colonel Sydney understands you have some distressing thought on your mind, which you would fain reveal. What is it, my good child?"

And again she fixed those large, inquiring, beautiful, yet dreadful eyes upon him.

"Colonel Sydney, in the name of the common Judge of all mankind, if justice, if human feelings still have existence on earth—cause Blood and the devil, Oates, to be arrested—instantly!" exclaimed Mervyn, wildly. "They are murderers! they have murdered Godfrey! I will prove it—may lightnings slay me else, even as I speak!"

"Be calm, young man," said Sydney, glancing at Lady Howard compassionately, but she had turned her face away. "Be calm! 'tis plain that your excited fancy, as oft indeed haps, hath taken the shadow and hues of passing events, and distorts them into fantastic horrors. If these dreadful events of latter days exercise such disturbing influence on sane and sober minds, what must they on a wild and troubled imagination like thine?"

"I tell you, Colonel Sydney, if there be truth in heaven or earth, I speak it!" exclaimed the youth, with desperate vivacity. "Monmouth, Shaftesbury, Essex—ay, lady, the Lord Howard himself, though meaning it not—caused this dreadful deed—Blood and Oates are but the executioners!"

"I have explained to you, Colonel Sydney, why I take no offence from these wild ravings of a diseased fancy," said the countess, in a low, agitated tone.

"Certainly, my lady, it were unreasonable," said Sydney, significantly.

"Oh, surely, surely, Lady Howard, you will bear witness that I came to your house in company with Blood—that I was introduced to you by him——" began Mervyn, when the lady hastily interrupted him.

"Mr. Blud?" she said, with remarkable shortness of pronunciation. "Mr. Blud, I do indeed recollect, came

here with a message from my Lord Shaftesbury—and methinks he did introduce to me some youth of your inches—but 'tis some time since. And yet now I recollect—alack, poor child! he spoke to me of some infirmity, in your else excellent sense, which at times made you mad; but the fit soon passed—prithee be calm."

"And, perchance, in some access of thy disorder, thou didst leap from one of the bridges into the river?" said Sydney, sternly. "Madness alone can excuse such an act; for, know, child, that even the noble Greeks and Romans did ever esteem that man dishonoured who basely threw away a life which his country might still need."

"I threw away no life! I perilled my life to save my life!" said Mervyn, bewildered by the new intricacies of his position. "I fled from a den of murderers. Colonel Sydney, I do not ask of you to believe one word which I shall not substantiate by facts. Get me a warrant and a few soldiers, and if I lead you not to the very house—'tis in Alsatia—where they trapped and murdered Godfrey—let me be branded with the mark of Cain, and torn to pieces by wild horses!"

"Can it be that this madness is feigned—that this youth is in the villanous service of the court to counteract the recent horrible discovery?" said Lady Howard, answering the surprised look of Sydney. "My poor child, if you are engaged in any such complot, I do beseech you desist, for it will but redound to your own shame and punishment."

"The king and his minions are, doubtless, wicked enough to form such a contrivance, but I cannot believe this fair boy to be of the plot; he may be deceived," observed Sydney, coldly. "Do but feel his pulse, my Lady Howard; how it leaps. 'Tis delirium, and his whole frame is on fire. Endeavour to banish these dreadful imaginations, youth, and rest will restore your clearer reason."

"You will not, then, believe me? You will not aid me to hunt out these murderers?" gasped Mervyn, almost choked with emotion.

"It is impossible; you are only raving, boy," said Lady Howard, rising. "We will see you anon, when you are calmer. Come, colonel, the company are waiting us."

"Then on your heads be all the blood which shall be shed by the axe of public assassination," shouted the youth, with all his remaining strength. "Oh, Colonel Sydney,

men call you just; and will you suffer Englishmen to be murdered in the name of justice?"

"Nay, I would die sooner than one hair of an English head should be plucked unjustly," said Sydney, with his grand smile. "But you are not now capable of rational discourse. I will revisit you when I have dined, and hope to find these wild phantasmata of a sick brain sobered down."

"Tell Lord Shaftesbury from me that he is an atrocious conspirator," exclaimed the youth, excited to madness by the disbelief of his direful tale. "But I will have no more blood upon my head. I will not stay dozing in bed while honest men have their lives sworn away by hellish murderers. I will out—out as I am—and proclaim it everywhere."

He made a strong, almost spasmodic effort to rise in his bed, grasping the rich quilt as if to use it as a covering, but Lady Howard, uttering a faint shriek, caught him by the shirt-sleeve. His sight seemed then to spin round, his brain swelled as if to burst the skull, and he sank insensible on his pillow.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE REIGN OF FANATICISM

This pause on the rack of mental agony was destined to have an abrupt termination. Several hours seemed to have elapsed, for when Mervyn awoke suddenly it was night, but the room was full of torches. The voice of Sydney was heard in loud expostulation, the old nurse was wailing and wringing her hands, and a moment's glance showed Mervyn that his room was full of musketeers. Then he heard another voice—the abominable voice of Oates! Its sounds seemed to fill him with indescribable loathing and hatred, and he sprang up, shouting, "Secure the murderer!" till the room rang again.

"Oy, oy, gentleman, secure him!—that is the villanous tool of the paupishers!" shouted Oates, turning with a visage inflamed with fiendish rage. "Secure him!—you have his Maujesty's warrant and mine."

"But he is not in a condition to be removed, Mr. Oates,"

said Colonel Sydney, very vehemently. "The physician declares his life in danger, and it will be at the peril of yours, if you attempt to remove him."

"Indubitably, Colonel Sydney, honoured sir," replied Oates. "If he dies on the way to Newgate, so much the better for him—he will thereby escape the gallows. But I own, Colonel Sydney, I am surprised to see so excellent a true-blue Protestant and abhorrer of arbitrary power support the cause of a young paupish villain and espial, hired to overthrow the true Protestant religion, and stoifle the discovery of the execrable abominable ploat which——"

The worthy gentleman had proceeded thus far in his harangue when his progress was stopped by a sudden tightening in the throat. Mervyn had leaped out of bed, sprung at his throat, and holding it with the strenuous grasp of madness, he shricked, "Seize him, seize him!" with all his force. Oates yelled murder, and attempted in vain to shake his hold loose, till one of the soldiers rushed in, seized Mervyn, tore him off with great violence, and handcuffed him. Even when secured, Oates attempted to strike his young victim; but Sydney clutched his arm back, and protested he would not allow the boy to be ill-used, whatever was his offence.

"Will you resist the king's warrant, Mr. Sydney?" vociferated Oates.

"Let me see it, and I will answer you," replied the colonel, with calm dignity. "You have made an illegal arrest, Mr. Oates, for you have not shown the prisoner your warrant."

"It is here," said Oates, rudely thrusting a parchment into the colonel's hand, who read it deliberately aloud, and found that it was a warrant in due form, authorising the bearer to seize, apprehend, detain, and bring before the worshipful Alderman Bethel, or any other of his Majesty's justices of the peace, the person of one Ichabod Mervyn, Jesuit novice of St. Omer.

"Well, colonel, do you surrender the body of this criminal quietly, at the command of your King and mine?" said Oates, with a malicious sneer.

"I surrender this accused person, but no criminal," replied Sydney. "A jury of his country, and not your too-ready lips, must pronounce him such, if such he be; but you arrest him at the peril of doing murder."

"The worst mischief will be cheating the hangman of

his fee," replied Oates; "so, officers, dress your prisoner —by force, if he resist."

"If I am to go before a magistrate, I will go willingly, gentlemen," said Mervyn. "I do but ask a patient hearing to the horrors I have to reveal."

"I promise you, my young master, you shall go before a magistrate, ay, and a judge and a jury, and then an airing to Tyburn," said Oates, ferociously.

"Methinks for a man of your holy garb you demean yourself more like a fiend than a Christian, Master Oates," said Sydney, slackening the rope which Oates was fastening very tight round the youth's wrists. "This binding and fettering one of the king's subjects, unless he resist, is against the law, and I will not suffer it."

"Everybody knows, Master Colonel, it is not by your good pleasure that his Majesty has any subjects at all," sneered Oates. "And as for your religion, there's not a 'prentice that knows trap from ball but knows you are given to the atheistic, deistic, pantheistic adoration of Greek and Roman gods, and——"

"By Heaven! I could almost find it in my heart to dishonour this sword in thy mean, dishonest blood," shouted Sydney, turning pale with anger, and touching his hilt.

"Bear me witness, gentlemen, the colonel obstructs the king's warrant," said Oates, in his screech-owl tones.

"Trouble not yourself with this wretch, noble sir," interposed Mervyn, quivering all over with rage and feverish excitement; "let him but take me before a magistrate, and if I prove him not so black a fiend that hell will scruple to receive him, let men quote me for a liar until the last day, which shall proclaim my truth in thunder."

Mervyn did not understand what sort of justice is dispensed by fanaticism, but the colonel did, and he shook his head sorrowfully. Nevertheless, Oates looked perturbed, and hurried the proceedings as much as possible. Mervyn was soon dressed in some clothes which Sydney lent him, and the colonel obtained permission, rather from the prudence than the humanity of Oates, that the prisoner should go to the city in his coach. Something supernatural seemed to have revived Mervyn's strength. He walked with firmness, thought distinctly, felt no alarm—his course seemed to lie so open and apparent before him. He had not yet learned that it is not enough to speak the truth, to be believed.

In a short time the procession was marshalled, and the unconscious heir of Aumerle was led down the gilded staircase of his own magnificent mansion, in the custody of thieftakers, as a traitor and a felon.

By this time a mob had gathered round the house, and understanding that their beloved doctor had captured one of Godfrey's murderers, greeted their appearance with yells, hootings, and hisses, mingled with vehement applause for Oates. Sydney, who had determined to accompany the prisoner, directed the coachman to drive fast, and they were soon out of hearing of the clamorous mob. The report, however, spread far and near, and when Oates triumphantly escorted his prisoner into the Guildhall, the court was already crowded to suffocation.

Mervyn stood for some moments at the bar before he formed a clear notion of the scene in which he found himself principal actor, so confused and stunned were his intellects. The sight of Colonel Sydney by his side somewhat encouraged him, and amidst the buzz and uproar of the scrambling mob he looked curiously around, as if he had no more interest in the scene than a common spectator. He now perceived that he was in a sort of sheepfold, in the middle of a lofty hall, and before him, on an elevated chair, sat a stout bloated man, with a round fat face, small, twinkling, vindictive eyes, and a pair of large hands, tightly clasped on a projecting stomach of aldermanic dimensions. He wore the scarlet robe and gold chain of his office, and sat in magisterial solemnity, and with that look of importance which weak men never fail to wear when thrust into a part beyond their management. This was Mr. Sheriff Bethel, as he was called to the last day of his life, from his exploits while in that dignity—a man who, from his determined opposition to the court, was considered a great patriot, and idolised by the populace. Mervyn, however, could scarcely reconcile his fat, well-fed figure with the character for extreme niggardliness, which acquired for the sheriff the immortal dishonour of Dryden's satire.

"Well, doctor—worthy Doctor Oates—so, so, you bring a prisoner—eh? a Jesuit, eh?" said the magistrate, when silence was obtained. "Well, well, nobody can deny but that you are one of the greatest saviours of our nation which the Lord has raised up these many years. May He keep you in health and strength, Mr. Oates, to work out

the work, and save us from the execrable popish plot, and all our precious lives and liberties. Well, sir, what is there against this young villain? He hath a rare hang-dog look —is he, too, in the plot?"

"Your worship," replied Oates, in a sanctimonious voice, "Heaven knows with what anguish and sorrow I appear against this youth, whereto yet my duty compels me, seeing that holy Abraham did not resist the voice of the Loard when he was commanded to slay Isaac, even Isaac his only son! But, oh! with what heartrendings—for verily my bowels yearn unto him—am I obliged to accusate him, not only of the vilest ingratitude to me, but of being concerned, I fear but too deeply, in the late most shocking, horrible, bloody, paupish murder of Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, that excellent magistrate, who, please the Loard, is now among the elect in Paradise!"

"Do but hear me—a single word, worshipful judge—I adjure you, if you would not have this roof fall on our heads!" exclaimed Mervyn, clasping his hands wildly.

"Peace, wretch!" said Bethel, sternly. "What you may have to say in your defence shall be heard afterwards; but I trow there is no man in England so arrant an ass as to believe anything a Jesuit can say or swear, considering the damnable power of absolving from all oaths alleged by your abominable Church, and the Antichrist at its head."

"Yea, I do accuse this imp of Satan of being hired by the paupish party—(I would I might say *who*, but they are too high marks for any but God's arrows!)" continued Oates, blackening with passion. "I say again, this hideous Jesuit spawn is hired to trump up some wicked and most calumnious charge against me, Titus Oates, to the great stoifling of the ploat, the putting down the Protestant Religion and Reformation, and introducing of arbitrary power and French government, or rather tyranny!"

"Have a care, Mr. Oates!—these are extraordinary accusations, which methinks you will have some difficulty in substantiating," said Colonel Sydney. "Let me suggest a fairer account of this matter to your worship. This poor youth is suffering under a delirium to which he is subject, during which, I fear, he did leap into the Thames, whence I rescued him at some little peril. And he was visited by a burning fever, during the paroxysms of which his ravings ran perchance on that engrossing topic of the late horrible

discoveries, which turn all men's bosoms into charnel-houses of dismal cogitations."

"Ravings!—oh, would they were!" said Mervyn: "let me but be heard, and I will prove those ravings truths, fixed as firmly as the heavens above us! Secure that monster! He is a murderer! he murdered Sir Edmundbury, either with his own hand or by another's!"

"He seems to rave now, at all events, Mr. Sydney," said Bethel, sharply.

"Your worship, he is as sane and sober as I am; 'tis but his factious malice," said Oates, with rabid fierceness. "He is suborned by those who wring gold from the blood and sweat of this doomed nation, to put down our Master's providence in the late discoveries of a vile, execrable, never-to-be-sufficiently-detested ploat of Antichrist."

"I doubt, I doubt, there is some murtherous strong hand in this intrigue, reverend Master Oates," said Bethel, shaking his head with a sinister meaning. "But what particular charge must I commit him on? Though, indeed, a man may well be chary of doing justice against papists, since the fatal, horrible example we have just seen. Nevertheless," said Bethel, addressing his clerk, "Minshull, make out a mittimus to Newgate."

"But, please your worship, we must first have some tangible legal charge, else your worship is liable to the new Habeas Act, and what not," said the clerk, a slender red-haired man, leaning over a desk before the city worthy.

"Ay, ay; well, well, Mr. Oates, and what is your charge?" said Bethel, gruffly.

"Let me first explain to your worship," said Oates, "that this wretched boy is a robber's foundling, whom the Jesuits of St. Omer were bringing up in the Egyptian darkness of paupish superstition, when I——"

"Ha, St. Omer!" exclaimed a voice in the crowd.

"Who spoke there?" said Oates, turning sharply.

"Blessed Mr. Oates," replied a whining voice, "it was a gallant sinfully caparisoned in gilded trappings of Satan, being crimson barred with gold; but he pushed his way out when you turned to rebuke him."

"Some man-serving slave of the court; some gay licentiate of pleasure," said Oates, coldly. "But as I was a-saying, your worship, when I came to St. Omer I found little Judas here in the house of bondage, and, as I thought,

loosened his spiritual chains ; yea, brought him to the fold, even as a precious yeanling of salvation. But I have since found to my cost that he was merely hung upon me as a Jesuitical spy."

" Why, thou most abhorred liar and villain ! " exclaimed Mervyn.

" Peace ! " shouted Bethel ; " if you dare to interrupt the witness, I will have you flogged into a proper respect of the court."

" That by your leave you shall not, Mr. Sheriff," said Sydney. " The law of England nowhere bestows such power on the magistrate, and I will take care you do not exceed the law."

" Why ! what is this boy to you, colonel ? " said Bethel, with considerable surprise.

" He is human," replied Sydney.

" Why, for that matter, I hope we are all human, Colonel Sydney," said Bethel, purpling up. " At least, I see not that any of us have beasts' heads, though there may be a club-foot among us, for aught I know ! But you hear the people do not like your quibblings and fribblings—and you know your own maxim—*Vox populi, vox Dei !* So if you cannot hold your peace, colonel, you must leave the justice-room."

Sydney being silent, the magistrate proceeded.

" Well, Mr. Oates, go on for the third time."

" An't please your worship," said Oates, with a strained meekness, " as I was saying—seduced by his tears and feigned love for me, I suffered him privily to withdraw from the seminary, and accompany me to this land of light, if we may call it so, notwithstanding the dark clouds gathering over our heads. And look ye, sirs, directly he lands here, he enters into a correspondence with certain high parties who shall be nameless, no doubt at the command of his St. Omer patrons. Your worship, I detected him in the very act, coming from St. James's palace, where Heaven knows no good was to be learned to the Protestant religion. Yet again, on his feigned repentance I forgave him. But again detecting him in the like practices, I discharged him from my service about a fortnight agone, and have since neither seen nor heard of him till I was informed by the maid-servant of that poor sacrificed gentleman (sacrificed for loving us all better than his own poor life !) that it was he who lured

Sir Edmundbury forth. And they do say that he was disguised as a page of the duke's—but Heaven forbid I should say by any knowledge of his highness! But Sir Edmundbury was never after seen till we found his precious limbs mangled and bleeding in Pancras Ditch."

"Colonel Sydney," exclaimed Mervyn at this moment, in a voice of such agony that it in a manner compelled audience, "I call down the lightnings direct on my head, if I speak falsely when I say that this man—this monster—brought about Sir Edmundbury Godfrey's murder! Do but hear me, gentlemen! On my life, on my soul, as we shall all some day meet before the eternal Judge above"—but choked with emotion, he broke off and could only point to Oates, gasping, "Murderer!"

This eloquence of nature produced a great and general sensation. Even Oates, with all his impudence, was for a moment appalled; but he soon rallied.

"Oh, thou wolf in lamb's wool!" he exclaimed, "dare you deny that you inveigled Godfrey from his home? ay, that you wore the royal livery? Look, the remnants are on him still! But here is evidence not to be renegated! Dr. Baxter is there, and the woman-servant Rachel, who admitted him that fatal morn, and, as she shamefully confesses, having her eye pleasantly tickled with his carnal beauty, took so earnest a look at him, that by the same token she recognises him now."

At this point a dismal weeping was heard, and Rachel made her appearance at the bar, clad in a black cloak and hood.

"Do not weep, Mrs. Rachel, your evidence is unnecessary," said Mervyn, resolutely. "I deny none of the circumstances alleged concerning Sir Edmundbury's leaving his house under my guidance, but——"

"Then, oh, prove where you left that godly martyr, and what you have done with yourself since!" shouted Oates.

"Nay, if he admits that point, he admits the murder too, and we shall at last get to the bottom of the plot!" said Bethel, with a speaking glance at the mob, who answered with confused murmurs.

"But surely, and in bare justice, your worship will hear what defence the boy can make?" said Sydney.

"I will not permit the court to be dictated to, Mr.

Sydney," said Bethel. "You must either allow business to proceed or quit the court. I am sorry to reprimand a gentleman of your quality, but——"

"Of my quality!" interrupted Sydney. "Your worship mistakes. No man hath any quality in an English court of justice but guilt or innocence. At least, I know it was so under Cromwell, tyrant and usurper as he was, and if under a lawful government, as we all hear it is—but I will say no more, only entreating you, before condemning, to hear the prisoner's defence."

"We must hear the witnesses first, I suppose?" said Bethel, peevishly. "Well, Mr. Baxter. I'faith, we are proud to see as blessed a witness as ever stood on this side martyrdom."

Baxter appeared as this compliment was uttered, and, bowing slightly to the court, turned and looked Mervyn steadfastly in the face. It was not in nature to endure this scrutiny without some emotion, especially in connection with the horrible charges which Mervyn felt were enveloping him like a mesh. Oates pointed triumphantly to his wavering complexion, and the venerable Puritan sighed heavily. He then delivered his evidence relating to the scene we have described, which was abundantly supported by Rachel's statement. All present gazed with horror at the prisoner, who himself stood amazed at the mass of appearances arrayed against him. Sydney himself was struck.

"Well, Colonel Sydney," said Bethel, exultingly, "what say you now for your client?"

"He is not my client, sir—nay, he is less mine than yours," replied Sydney. "Yet, though I do see that there is a charge against the prisoner, I see not that it is proved, though suspicions may certainly be entertained, which perchance he will remove when he is allowed to speak. It is surely just to hear the youth in his explanations. Perchance he may tell us by what chance I found him in the Thames struggling for life, and seeming to fly from some demoniac enemy."

"That can I," said Oates, eagerly, "for, happening to catch sight of him in the horridest company that ever was, I pursued, for my heart bled with pity; so he ran down the Tower stairs, and, being a fine swimmer and supposing I meant him some great punishment, he takes me to water like a fish, and so no more of him."

"Methought, Mr. Oates, I heard you swear you had not seen him for a fortnight?" said Sydney.

"I meant in a general sense, as being absent from my service," said Oates, somewhat embarrassed. "And besides, it was so dark a night that I could scarcely distinguish his face to say I saw him."

"Pray God there be no malice in this case!" said Sydney.

"I have already warned you, sir, I will not suffer such treatment of the king's witnesses," said Bethel, fiercely. "Nothing but my great respect for your honourable name and character hinders me from committing you for contempt, as I certainly shall this desperate criminal, for aiding and abetting in the murder of Sir Edmundbury Godfrey. But I hope that he will have grace given him to repent, and merit pardon by an open confession of all his villanies, whoever or whatever it may involve." He then made a sign to the clerk, who with great *sang-froid* began mending a pen.

"Well, then, now hear me—I ask no mercy—nothing but justice!" said Mervyn, in a tone of frantic desperation. "I am innocent, and if I prove not these wretches as certainly guilty of Godfrey's murder as Cain of Abel's, may this roof descend upon us all and crush me alone!"

"A damnable popish argument, smelling strongly of the sour leaven of superstition," said Bethel, shaking his head. "It is my duty, young man, to warn you to say nothing which may criminate yourself, for your life is in danger."

"You will not hear me, then? But I will be heard!" said Mervyn, violently agitated. "Good people, hear me! This assassin and hired spy inveigled me from St. Omer under base pretexts, which——"

"We cannot suffer you to use such language, sirrah!" interrupted the magistrate.

"You shall! I will be heard!" shouted Mervyn. "Yes, he lured me to England, and by his means I was forced to become in some measure an accomplice in the crimes of his faction. I was kept a prisoner by him and his coadjutor, Colonel Blood, in Whitefriars,—where I was a chance witness of the cruel conspiracy of Shaftesbury, Monmouth, Essex, and the Lord Howard, to maltreat a Protestant magistrate, and lay the blame on the popish party. They did indeed employ me as their unconscious instrument, to lure the poor old man into their hands, but——"

" Your worship," interrupted Oates, " will you suffer such a farrago of wild nonsense to be heard against such thrice noble men, especially when I assure you that I did never see Colonel Blood once in my whole life ? "

" Mr. Bethel, let me observe to you, the boy is in a fever, and these are ravings, as can be certified by Dr. Brook," said Sydney.

" I doubt these ravings are firstlings of a new plot to bolster up the old one," said the justice, shaking his wise head. " At all events, he had better lock up what he has to say for his trial before a jury of his countrymen."

" No, no—here, here ! " shouted Mervyn, his eyes flashing fire, and shaking like one possessed. " I tell you, judge, I accuse Oates of the murder of that poor old man ! "

" Loard have mercy on us all ! poor erring wretches imprisoned in a tabernacle of flesh ! " ejaculated the doctor. " In charity, your worship, let us account him mad."

" We must not defeat justice because your saintly spirit so meekly forgives," said Bethel. " He seems indeed demented ; but his accusations are prompted by older heads. At present, Mr. Oates, I commit him to Newgate on your affidavit ; he may have a doctor there. But I fear me, after all, he will die in his shoes."

" I offer bail to any amount," said Sydney.

" I will take none," replied the magistrate, sharply. A loud hurrah arose from the mob, and Mervyn was obliged to clutch the bar, to hinder himself from falling. He made no further effort to obtain a hearing. Even Sydney seemed astonished and perplexed with what he had heard, and he, too, left the bar while the warrant was making out, whispering to Mervyn that he would see him again in Newgate.

Two or three constables now seized and handcuffed Mervyn, and, taking him between them, forced a passage out of the hall with their staves, but not without great difficulty. A mob was waiting outside, who received the constables and their prisoner with a tremendous yell. Stones and brickbats flew about them, and it was with the greatest difficulty they could force a way along, when suddenly Oates made his appearance, and the popular rage changed into one universal acclaim of joy and reverence. " Hats off ! " resounded on every side, and in an instant not a head was covered. The women crowded round him,

the men pressed near for the honour of shaking hands with the great champion of religion.

Oates took the opportunity to entreat the people not to molest the prisoner, assuring them that the laws had him in safe custody, and that important secrets might be expected from him. These remonstrances produced great effect, and the escort was suffered to pass on without much annoyance beyond hisses and yells, until it reached Cheapside.

CHAPTER XXXIII

RESCUE OR NO RESCUE!

When the constables, with their prisoner, approached Cheapside, the rush of a new mob compelled them to delay for some minutes, beating about with their staves in vain. A chorus of voices chanting some melancholy psalm was heard, and cries of "Godfrey's body! Godfrey's body!" rang far and near. On hearing this, Oates, who was haranguing the crowd from a high horse-stone, sprang down and pushed into it. The constables, finding the cause of delay, endeavoured to make good their passage before the inflamed masses could arrive. But the pressure was too great, and they were obliged to take refuge with their prisoner on the steps of a butcher's stall, while one of them battled his way back to procure a stronger posse. At this moment Mervyn felt his sleeve pulled, and a voice which he thought he had heard before whispered in his ear, "Your life is in danger—be on the alert—friends are at hand."

The prisoner turned, but his unknown friend had vanished in the crowd. He was persuaded, however, that it was Claude Duval, and the consciousness that he possessed even one friend in that vast multitude was indescribably consolatory.

The constables grew more and more alarmed, both for their own and the prisoner's safety, for the mob around showed unequivocal signs of violence, and were pelting them with mud and stones. Luckily the great stream was directed down Cheapside, to meet the body of Godfrey, which was coming from St. Pancras Fields to the Guildhall,

where it was to wait an inquest. But as it was impossible to force a passage, and their position grew every moment more precarious, one of the constables seized the butcher's cart, which was before his stall, and got into it with the prisoner; Mervyn was seated between two constables, handcuffed and pinioned, while the third beat the horse and urged it through the crowd.

Meanwhile the multitude fearfully increased both in numbers and ferocity. The mob which accompanied Godfrey's body had met and mingled intelligence as well as strength, and the news of the capture of a Jesuit and alleged murderer of the unfortunate magistrate spread far and near. As they entered Newgate Street, Mervyn heard an uproar of marrow-bones and cleavers, the usual signal among the butchers to assemble, and vast numbers of savage-looking men in blue frocks, with bare arms, and wielding the instruments of their sanguinary trade, issued from the purlieus of the market. The shouts and fury of these masses, even the missiles which flew about their heads, seemed not at all to disturb Mervyn: he kept the same tranquillity of despair.

Every window seemed clustering with spectators, every roof was crowded with hanging masses; and thus accompanied by the yells and attacks of the populace, they approached Newgate, the strong walls and spiked summits of which appeared at a little distance. But the space intervening was so blocked up by a mass wedged, shrieking, and struggling together, that it was found impossible to proceed, and the cart stood still while the officers dismounted to force a passage.

Whilst a desperate fight took place around his vehicle, Mervyn's eye was attracted by a spectacle which, horrible as it was, seemed to him a natural phasis of the confused and stormy dream in which he was involved. A vast mob flowed, wave upon wave, down Newgate Hill, amidst the most astounding uproar, part engaged in roaring a hymn, while the rest yelled and shrieked in direful chorus. Some carried torches which they waved like Bacchanals in the air, and by the wild uncertain glare of this light Mervyn saw something indistinctly borne on a bier covered with a sheet, round which the crowd seemed gathering, and rolling like the sea in a whirlpool. Dark countenances, lurid with fatigue and passion, surrounded the corpse, among which Mervyn's eye could not mistake the detestable features

of Oates. The wretch was pointing at him as he sat in the cart, and seemed to direct the popular fury upon him, for at the same moment shouts of "A judgment, a judgment! tear him to pieces!" rang on every side, and many of the torch-bearers rushed yelling towards him. Knives, axes, swords, glittered on every hand, and showers of stones assailed the constables, who vainly attempted to protect their prisoner. One of them was struck down by a powerful butcher, and the other sustained a very severe handling; but the third, who still sat with Mervyn in the cart, attempted to lash the horse over whatever stood in the way. The mob, however, seized the reins, and beat the poor animal about the head and breast to force it back. But the horse reared and kicked so violently that at last it twisted the harness off its head, and rushed off at a fearful speed down the hill. The mob gave way on every side, yelling, crushing, and tumbling over each other. The constable who sat by Mervyn leaped out and fell with a heavy crash, head foremost, on the pavement; but the prisoner was too well secured to make any attempt at escape. The animal continued its mad speed till within a short distance of the bier-carriers, who rushed confusedly out of its way, but its feet got entangled in the loose reins, and it fell down powerless on the kerbstone, where it lay bleeding and struggling ineffectually to rise.

Mervyn rose with the intent of leaping out of the cart, to save himself from the kicks of the prostrate horse, when Oates pointed at him, yelling, in his most horrible tones, "Lo, Goad's judgment!—the murtherer! the murtherer!" Instantly the mob rushed round the cart, some clambering up the wheels, some behind, some, in their ardour, scrambling over the panting steed. Mervyn was clutched simultaneously by twenty hands, dragged, or rather torn, he knew not how, over the shafts into the street, and amidst uproarious shouts of "No Popery!—Tear him to pieces!—No Antichrist!" was dragged on to the bier, amidst blows and every species of contumely.

Several of the mob, amongst whom was Oates, bawled out, "Bring the murtherer here, and see if the corpse bloods forth!" and this experiment, fortunately for Mervyn, seemed to suit the taste of the ruffians who had seized him. It was then a general belief, which still holds ground in some remote districts, that the corpse of a murdered person

would burst forth bleeding on the approach of the murderer.

Severely buffeted, his clothes torn from his back, pale as the ghastly corpse before him, Mervyn was hurried close up to the bier, and Oates clutched him in one hand, while with the other he raised the gory sheet. So intense was the curiosity of the multitude to ascertain the result of their philosophical experiment, that the uproar suddenly ceased, and a deep, death silence swayed the whole mass. Mervyn gazed with an icy shudder at the dreadful spectacle thus forced on his gaze. Sir Edmundbury's corpse lay coiled upon the bier, covered with mud and slime. His flesh was already purpling over with corruption, and seemed as if it had lain for some days in water, it was so swollen and discoloured. There was a deep wound in the breast, where his sword was found buried to the hilt, and the body was covered with slashes and bruises. The neck was evidently broken, for the head hung loosely on one side, and the glazed eyes were widely open, the tongue was hanging out, and the flesh was gorged and spotted, and other horrible signs of strangulation were awfully visible.

Mervyn gazed upon this frightful spectacle with no sign of emotion but a choked groan, and, unable to articulate a word, he looked round, gasping and pointing to Oates. Again the wild yells of fury resounded, torches were brandished, and unnumbered voices called to him to touch the corpse. He obeyed mechanically, extending his hand to that of the inanimate magistrate, and at the same moment Oates artfully tilted the dead body, so that a few drops of corrupt fluid issued from the nose and wounds.

This was enough. A roar like the sea among breakers resounded in his ear, the mob pressed overwhelmingly upon him, and Oates's yell of "Blood for blood, saith the Loard!" pierced far above the tumult. Mervyn gave himself up for lost. Some rugged hand seized him by the collar of his shirt—all that remained of that garment—and a butcher, crushing his way through the crowd, aimed a blow at his head with a cleaver, which would undoubtedly have split it in two. But a bludgeon suddenly interposed, and simultaneously the butcher reeled back under a dreadful stroke on his own skull. Mervyn instantly recognised in his rescuer—a man in the garb of a waggoner—the powerful form of Colonel Blood.

"No, no, my masters, fair play is a jewel," said the colonel, laying vigorously about him with his cudgel. "Hang him if you will, but no murder."

"Have at thee again, though thou wert the devil or Colonel Blood!" yelled the baffled ruffian, returning to the charge with increased violence.

"Nay, thou art not the man to play me at single stick," said the colonel, dexterously parrying the blow, and returning one which laid his opponent senseless on the stones. "Have a care, gentlemen, what ye do. Here comes a King's messenger to take the prisoner before his Majesty's council. Hands off, or mine are on."

As he spoke a horseman in the uniform of the King's guard appeared, forcing his way through the crowd and shouting, "Room, room, in the King's name!" He waved a paper over the heads of the mob, who rushed back in masses from the tramp of a powerful horse which he seemed to ride recklessly through them. He arrived panting and breathless, and without raising the flaps of a large hat which hung over his face, he shook the paper in Oates's eyes, who still held the youth firmly grasped.

"A secretary's warrant!" he shouted. "Surrender your prisoner in the King's name, to be led before the council!"

"To be saved by the powers of Antichrist presiding there!" yelled Oates. "Men of London! will ye suffer it?"

"No Popery!—Tear him to pieces!" echoed the crowd, but none dared approach within range of Blood's terrible cudgel, more especially as several athletic figures, armed with the same instrument, had ranged themselves on his side. The messenger also drew his sword, and backing his horse, called to Mervyn to mount behind. But, enraged with the prospect of their victim's escape, the mob now regained courage, and made a rush at him. All Blood's immense strength could not resist the impetus, and he was swept struggling furiously back; but the cavalier, perceiving the desperation of affairs, stooped from the saddle and tore Mervyn up before him. Then flourishing his sword in glittering circles, he made a furious charge, and shouting, "In the King's name!" plunged forward, and either knocked down or galloped over all who opposed.

For a considerable distance they were pursued by stones, mud, and every species of abuse. But the yells and missiles

gradually grew fainter and fewer, and the horse, an animal of great size and power, proceeded at the full stretch of its limbs. They turned rapidly down Fetter-Lane, which was perfectly dark and deserted, and galloping down a narrow street near Temple Gardens, passed the boundary into Alsatia. Dashing up another narrow lane, bordered by a high dead wall, the horseman suddenly paused at a ruinous gate which seemed to admit into a garden; but the last recollection which Mervyn had was, that his deliverer alighted, and exclaiming, "Now, sir, you are safe!—I am Claude Duval!" received him insensible into his arms.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A DISCOVERY

Mervyn's first return of consciousness was a sensation of pricking and cold in the arm, and opening his eyes, he saw that some one held it over a gallipot, and that he was bleeding, but very slowly and tricklingly. He looked earnestly at the person who held him, and saw that he was a thin tall man, with a pale cadaverous countenance, a large hooked nose, small brown rat-like eyes, bald, with a long beard, and a projecting under-lip, which seemed in a perpetual tremble. He was dressed in a shabby ill-fitting suit of black, with silver buckles, and a long red cap, ending in a tarnished gilt tassel. Claude Duval and Blood were sitting on the bed, watching his operations with apparent interest.

"Are we safe?" he murmured, after a faint survey of the apartment.

"Safe as Dover Castle," said the colonel.

"But Oates!—he will find me out, and I shall be torn to pieces!"

"Oh, ish it a bushness of Mr. Oates?" observed the practitioner. "Give me de list, Mr. Duval—thank you, shir!—I do not much care to meddle with Mishter Oates—he do quote de Bible so neatly."

"What if the black villain suspects our share in the rescue, and brings the train-bands on us," said Claude.

"He dare not—I know too much," replied Blood, significantly.

At this point of the conversation, a sweet ease and oblivion seemed to sink on Mervyn, and he knew no more. Fever, accompanied by delirium, kept possession of him for several days, but he knew not how time elapsed, nor what events filled it up. Sometimes he had wandering gleams of consciousness, in which he recollected that Claude Duval and the colonel seemed watching him with eager attention. Even after the rage of fever had yielded to the Jew's skill, he lay for hours and days immersed in thought, of which he could make no tangible meaning. The first sensible question which he asked was, whether Godfrey's murder was a dream?

Blood refused to answer until he was better able to converse; but observing that this prohibition seemed to make him more restless, he replied briefly that it was all true. A short pause followed, and Mervyn inquired what had become of Claude Duval. The colonel was evidently not much pleased with this query, and he replied shortly that he was engaged on one of his robbing excursions in the north. Mervyn then asked by what means his escape was effected, and on this point the colonel was more diffuse. He said that he and Claude Duval, on learning his arrest by Oates, had determined on a rescue at all hazards; and he added that if Claude's trick of counterfeiting a royal messenger had not succeeded, there was a band of determined fellows in the crowd who were to aid in a forcible rescue.

"And the monster still flourishes, battening in blood," said Mervyn, with a sigh of exhaustion. "And the murder of Godfrey is still unavenged?"

"And must remain so, unless you would become a parricide!" exclaimed Blood.

"A parricide!" said Mervyn, starting up and sinking back again with a deadly sickness at the heart. "A parricide!"

"Yes, a parricide!" returned Blood, pacing the room with great agitation. "I know you consider me as one of the murderers of Godfrey, though my intentions were only to execute Shaftesbury's plan; and as such you would bring me to the gallows. But know, boy, that in so doing, you would hang *your own father*!"

"My father? Villain, you lie!" exclaimed Mervyn, his

pale face kindling and flushing with passion. "I say it is a lie!—you are not my father!"

"Who but a father would have done for you what I have done?" said Blood, pausing abruptly, and looking at Mervyn with a strangely troubled expression. "Have I not hazarded my life to save yours?—spent my last pistole to rescue you, by means of Oates, from the hands of those accursed Jesuits, who were only training you up as a victim to their policy? I placed you under their care indeed—I, a proscribed and miserable wanderer, having no home—hunted by the bloodhounds of the law—placed you, my only child, in their hands. And they taught you—the rogues!—that you were the son of a malefactor hanged for some peasant-braining at St. Omer. Never gaze at me with those unbelieving eyes. I swear to thee, Mervyn, I am thy father, and, as such, am prepared to shed the last drop of my blood in thy defence. And now, boy, wilt thou, for a deed which cannot be recalled, inscribe thyself in the hellish list of those who have slain their fathers?"

"Why not?—this is the house where parricides are born and reared till they have strength to slay," groaned Mervyn. "Oh, and are you my father? A murderer! And have I longed my whole life, prayed, thirsted, dreamed, rushed madly forth into this bad and cruel world—only to learn this? But it is not true, Blood!" he continued, with flashing eyes. "You have coined this falsehood to escape the vengeance due to your crime! But think not, think not, to elude me so. Bury me if you will in the centre of the earth—I will rise and proclaim your guilt."

"Four feet of solid earth would keep you snug to the general resurrection, child," said Blood, calmly; "and, but that you are my son, what hinders me from silencing your threats with this dagger? Can you resist? Could I not lately have left you in the hangman's grasp?—were not the mob ready to tear you to pieces when I saved you?"

"But why have you kept yourself so long concealed, then?" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Because I could not bear the thought of presenting an outlaw, a man hunted like a wild beast, as your father," said Blood, in a tone thick with emotion. "But better times are coming. Shaftesbury will soon be in power, and I shall be pardoned—reinstated in my rank. I meant to

own you as my son when I could confer the title without fear, and you receive it without shame."

"That can never be," gasped the unhappy youth. "I cannot indeed persist in my resolution to bring either myself or the murderers of Godfrey to the scaffold; but to own you as my father without shame, horror, detestation, the most bitter anguish—never, never, never!"

"But I will force you to love me, boy," said Blood. "You shall owe much more to me than the life I have preserved. I need something to love me, savage, wild, remorseless as I seem! But think not I will persecute you with my relationship. I mean to close my life in battle against the Turks, or else to turn a monk of La Trappe—ha! ha!"

"And my mother—have I a mother?" said Mervyn.

"A mother!—yes—but she is wedded to another," replied Blood, with visible emotion. "Ay, there indeed I wronged thee, boy! I did betray her innocence, and she my love! Enough!—she is the wife of a man of high rank, and hates thee worse than poison, death, and hell—all of which she has deserved."

A shudder ran through Mervyn's veins, and he turned on his pillow with a low groan, which seemed the farewell sigh of hope. Blood stirred the fire violently, and then wiped the clammy dew which gathered on his huge brows with agitation.

"I have confided my soul's secret to you, Mervyn," he said at last. "And beware how you whisper it even in your prayers. Your mother herself—the she-wolf—longs for nothing so much as to lap her jaws in your blood."

To this revelation Blood added many particulars which stamped an air of probability on the legend. He refused, indeed, most positively to state who the personage was whom he called Mervyn's mother; but from hints which he dropped, coupled with the assurance that it was Lady Howard who had betrayed the youth to Oates, a wild conjecture darted into his mind that it might be her. He could obtain no satisfaction, however, and was left in the dark. The horror and despair of finding such a father furnished him indeed with sufficient food for bitter meditation.

Time passed, and Mervyn regained strength; but it was only to find himself a closer prisoner than ever. The colonel's

kindness was unremitting, and he left his pretended son alone as little as possible, but still there were many dreary hours of loneliness to be passed. Mervyn heard daily news of the progress of Oates—told to keep him in awe, but which fretted him almost to madness. The sea of popularity ran at high tide for Oates and his patrons. The parliament had opened in a most stormy humour; the ministry wavered; Prance was in Newgate, Coleman condemned; Catholic lords and gentlemen and priests were seized daily; a cloud of informers appeared in every direction. Blood seemed now to expect with confidence the advent of a popular administration, and his own immediate pardon on its instauration.

One evening, when they were discussing these matters, the conversation fell upon the Duke of Ormonde, whom the colonel asserted to be the author of all his misfortunes. He was relating his well-known attempt to hang that nobleman at Tyburn, an achievement of which he was very proud, when he was interrupted by a shrill but rather melodious whistle which reached them, as it seemed to Mervyn, from the river.

"Bah! it is Claude Duval," he muttered, after a moment's attention; "why does he come at such dark hours?"

He took a lamp, however, and went to admit him, and Mervyn's heart beat joyfully quick when he distinguished Claude's jovial voice on the stairs. As they ascended he perceived with surprise that there was a third person—a stranger. He was a man of large stature, muffled in a long black roquelaure, and wore a Spanish hat with large flaps, which in great measure concealed his face. But on reaching the landing-place he raised his head, and, the torchlight falling full on his severe and melancholy features, Mervyn started with amazement at the recognition which he thought he made. Claude outstripped the rest, ran to him, and embracing him with eagerness, whispered, "For Heaven's sake, show no surprise!" and began a loud congratulation on the improvement in his looks.

Meanwhile the stranger and Blood entered, and the first glance of the former, and his emphatic gesture, seemed to throw Mervyn into a nervous tremor. Claude made haste to prevent these symptoms from being observed; but though Blood politely bade his visitors welcome, he made a sort of involuntary movement to his pistols.

"Colonel Blood, you will excuse me," said Claude, "but knowing that trouble has taught you compassion, I have brought this gentleman, a French ecclesiastic, to take refuge a few hours with you, for it is rumoured that Oates intends to search the Queen's lodging, where he resides."

"The gentleman is welcome—your ghostly father as I presume, Claude?" replied the colonel, with a suspicious glance.

"*Morbleu!* (craving your pardon, father!) I came not acquainted with him in so creditable a manner," said Duval. "I chanced to meet his reverence on the Dover Road; but, having known him in France, I recognised him in time to spare myself a sacrilege."

"Yes, and did honestly return me scrip and purse, albeit something heavier than the apostle recommended," said the stranger, with a smile. "And now he completes his kindness by saving me from Mr. Oates's perquisitions."

"And you are in England, I presume, on the matter of these late troubles of ours?" said Blood. "I warrant his Holiness cannot sleep on them."

"I am in England on my Master's errand, to bring back the sinner and the lost one," replied the ecclesiastic, with an emphatic glance at Mervyn.

Blood invited the strangers to be seated, and Mervyn tremulously offered his services to remove the priest's roquelaure and hat, which were whitened with snow. But he declined this attention with some asperity, and contented himself with laying aside his large hat. He then took the seat indicated, and began discoursing on indifferent subjects. Mervyn felt, nevertheless, that his eye dwelt on him almost continually, and though he never dared to meet it, his own emotion grew almost uncontrollable.

Claude very seldom visited the colonel in his den without bringing preservatives against a famine, nor had he on this occasion. He called to Mervyn to help him unload a basket he had brought, which he obeyed with great alacrity, glad of an opportunity to conceal his feelings.

During the repast, the conversation ran on general subjects, but it flowed naturally into politics at last. The French ecclesiastic spoke English well, though with a foreign accent; and he discussed the points mooted with the fluency of one thoroughly master of his subject. He concluded a vivid description of the perils which menaced

Catholicism, by observing with a sigh that the Church was in less danger from without than within—that there were traitors even in their bosom; and he glanced at Mervyn.

"Nay, he at least is no traitor to the Bishop of Rome, if that be his liege," said Blood, with a gloomy chuckle.

"I have heard the story," replied the priest; "but methinks falsehood—to give it no worse name—even against so abominable a wretch as Oates, can do no good to the cause of truth."

"I spoke no word that was not true," replied Mervyn, trusting his voice with evident trepidation.

"Nay, sirs, it was but the ravings of fever," said Blood, carelessly.

"But, youth," said the priest, addressing Mervyn for the first time, "I have heard that Oates swore you were his servant, and had betrayed him to the Catholic party?"

"He lied—the villain!" said Mervyn, with vehemence. "He alone betrayed—betrayed me from the first instant I beheld him."

"And how, my son?" said the stranger, with a look of suppressed but extreme anxiety.

Mervyn glanced at Blood, and though he observed that his brow was deeply knit, he launched boldly into a narrative of his flight, and a passionate defence of his conduct.

The ecclesiastic listened with profound attention, but his austere countenance betrayed little emotion, and in spite of Blood's evident uneasiness, Mervyn continued his story till he had safely landed himself in England. And then his voice grew troubled, and finally he burst into a passion of tears.

"Enough! weep no more," said the priest, in a gentle and moved voice. "There is no sin so great which the Church cannot forgive to a sincere repentance. Tell me, child, are you willing to return to her maternal bosom?"

"Oh, how willing!" replied Mervyn; "but it may not be."

"It may, it can, it shall be!" replied the stranger, with sudden emotion. "Return, my son, to the arms of the Church, which stretches them out to welcome back the prodigal as—as I do." And Mervyn was instantly locked in his paternal embrace.

"What is the meaning of this?" exclaimed Blood, fiercely

clutching the boy's arm. "I am his father: I demand to know."

"His father—you?" exclaimed Duval.

"Peace, Claude," interrupted the ecclesiastic. "Colonel Blood, I am here to demand back the orphan whom your arts cajoled from my guardianship. I am the rector of St. Omer. We are two to one, but I am willing to ransom him with gold—I offer you a hundred pistoles."

"I will not play Abraham to an unbelieving generation, sacrificing mine only son," said Blood, bitterly. "And if ye are two to one, I have my backers too."

So saying, he produced a formidable pair of pistols.

"We are not barkers without teeth either, Master Blood," said Claude, producing a pair with equal rapidity; but the colonel sunk his with a contemptuous laugh, for Mervyn had rushed between them.

There was a moment's pause, during which the antagonists gazed watchfully at each other, and seemed hesitating what to do. It was broken by a hoarse, familiar voice in the corridor, bawling,

"Hoity, toity! what's a-doing here? Whoy, Master Blood, Master Blood, how's this? Are you turned Norfolk squire, and keep open house to all incomers?"

"It is that devil, Oates!" exclaimed Blood.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ESCAPADE

As the colonel pronounced the words, the worthy thus announced thrust open the door, and stepped hesitatingly in. Mervyn shrank back aghast; even Blood glared at him like a wild beast surprised in his den, and Claude stepped before the ecclesiastic, as if to conceal him; but the latter would not sanction this manœuvre: he turned Duval gently aside, and confronted Oates with a sternness and majesty of look and manner which, for the moment, abashed even his tried impudence. They looked at each other in silence for several moments.

"Loard be marciful to us poor wayfarers!" exclaimed

Oates, at last. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish! who had a-thought to meet such worshipful gentry here? So, so, Mr. Blood, have ye turned priest-hider? Gock! there be more cod to catch then I have net to carry!—But that I should find a popish sarpint in a true-blue Protestant hole. I thought only to have found you and the urchin, Colonel Blood."

"What mean you, villain?" exclaimed the colonel. "Speak quickly and begone! By Heaven, I know not what hinders me from doing the hangman's business on thee!"

"Nay, brother, I mean no harm to *you*—else I had brought my company in at the onset," replied Oates, with remarkable coolness. "I only want the kid—do you understand? And since accident has conferred a pleasure which all our diligence could not compass, this reverend gentleman and popish highwaymen must honour us with their society. Ay, stare as you will—I say, must! 'Tis a shame you should live longer at your own expense, for the government hath provided lodgings for gents of your degree in Newgate and the Tower."

"You are mad, tribune—you are mad!" said Blood. "See you not you are in my power? Were these gentlemen my bitterest enemies—and they are my very good friends—I would hold them safe, though my own life paid the price."

"Pooh, pooh! I run no risk; I know what I am about," replied Oates. "Assist me, and we will share the reward like brothers. A hundred guineas on Claude, in the *Hue and Cry*—as much on this young homicide—two hundred moidores offered by parliament on the Jesuit, dead or alive! You know him not, Blood—'tis the arch-plotter, Van Huysman, chief of that horrible consult held at the White Horse tavern, about killing his most saucred Maj——"

"Look ye, dog, vanish! or thou art on the way to receive thy damnable wages," said Claude, levelling his pistols at the villain's head.

"Peace, Claude, peace!" said Van Huysman, calmly. "Against a single man—or devil—I know not which—we run no danger Yes, Oates, I am he for whom you take me, Van Huysman. Wretch! and do you tremble before me, who have not feared your God? Serpent, that stole into

the Paradise of innocence! Judas, that betrayed with a kiss! Yes, I am he who disappointed the benevolent intention of chance, and saved thee from death in the flesh, only that thou mightest achieve thine own eternal ruin, and that of this loved and unfortunate child."

During this invective, Oates's eye sunk, he looked confused and irresolute, and kept gnawing his under lip.

"Oy, oy, yes, yes," he replied, hurriedly, "you may call me ungrateful about that presarval, too. The Loard reserved me for a great work; He made the stones His instruments; glory, glory! But I'll be revenged—I will—the execrable ploat! Remember how you treated me at St. Omer—made me sit at a table by myself, as if I had the plague. I'll be revenged. I have a warrant in my pocket to arrest all Jesuits, popish rogues, what not. I'll do't—it's come about now."

"As you shall find, Master Oates," said Claude, vehemently. "We are four to one; and I do feel well inclined to pay off an old score, by signing thee a passport direct to the fiend!"

"Naw, naw, mounseer, y'are only four to forty," said Oates, steadily. "Ye do not think I am fool enough to trust myself in the whale's jaws without a harpoon—like blessed Jonas. The house is surrounded, gentlemen—a whistle of mine brings in a boat's crew of musketeers who wait below. You are landlocked, too; resistance is in vain. I have choked the sentinel's horn with silver, but I come to offer you terms. Blood, hear me," he continued, clutching the colonel's arm, and speaking in a low fiendish whisper. "Lady Howard has offered me four thousand pounds to bring this younker to the gibbet, and you shall finger a cool thousand—eh?"

"Four thousand pounds! good, excellent, unparalleled murderess!" exclaimed Blood. "Four thousand pounds! why, the fiend! she only offered me a thousand if I would do it, and with my own hand too. And am I so much a cheaper villain than this toad of the devil's spawning? By hell-fire! I'll have it all; no one shall touch him but myself. I'll die sooner! look to it, Oates. Make yourself on the instant invisible, or—or—your life is in danger!"

"I can't believe you are such a noodle!—what! virtuous, colonel?—two thousand, then!" exclaimed Oates. "Hark! my men are impatient, and batter at the door."

"Where they may batter long enough, devil!" exclaimed Mervyn, entering the apartment, whence he had vanished for a moment, in the confusion, without being observed. "Those doors are triple brass against everything but artillery; I have bolted them. Come, if ye are men! The back way; the garden! 'Tis for our lives!" Then suddenly leaping on Oates, he struck him in the arm in time to discharge his pistols upwards, instead of at himself—the original aim. In a moment Claude was upon him, dashed away the pistols, and struck him a tremendous blow with the butt-ends. Oates fell, yelling murther! with all his might, but Blood hit him another severe blow, which seemed to quiet him. He was about to strike a third, which would have effectually silenced him, when Van Huysman arrested his arm.

"Spare him—vengeance is His!" he exclaimed. "Leave him to repentance, if it may be! Have you any way of flight, as Mervyn seems to say? If so, let us begone instantly."

"Hark, below!" exclaimed Claude. A low uproar of voices, and heavy blows at the portal, rang up the corridor.

Blood seized a torch, and, pistol in hand, opened the door of that mysterious staircase down which Mervyn had so often longed to penetrate. He bolted the door after them to delay pursuit, and took the same precautions with three others in succession which they encountered. They traversed a suite of deserted and mouldering chambers, descended another flight of stairs, and found themselves in a hall which terminated by a ruined portico on the garden.

Blood hastily extinguished the torch, and motioned them to halt for a moment in the shadow of the portico. The ruined garden lay before them, with its broken statues and weed-overgrown terraces. It was a bitter night, and though the moon shone with great brilliancy, the snow fell in such thick masses that even the colonel's expert eye was perplexed. He listened attentively, and for a moment heard no sound but the crackling of the frosty trees. But suddenly the gleam of a partisan caught his eye, and he counted three in succession along the garden wall, on the exterior. The wall at the end seemed, however, unguarded—probably because it was fenced on the other

side with a deep ditch, or rather sewer, flowing into the Thames.

Blood saw there was but one course, and he took it instantly. Motioning his companions to imitate his movements, he couched down on all fours, and stole cautiously along the edge of the wall, his hands and feet sinking deep in the snow. In this fashion, they came to the end of the garden, for it was impossible to cross the open ground without attracting the observation of a sentinel who had perched himself on a broken pedestal at the gate. The wind was very high, and blew Blood's hat off into some bushes, but he dared not attempt to follow it. It was evident that the report of the pistol had not reached the ear of these soldiers—probably deadened by the massive walls which intervened, and the noise of the river.

The fugitives now paused at a signal from the colonel, still couching like so many monstrous frogs. He then raised himself cautiously, and whispering to Mervyn that he must take care and not smother in the ditch, stooped and desired him to mount the wall on his shoulders. Mervyn made a sign for the ecclesiastic to go first, but Blood gave him a sharp twitch, and muttering, "I'll be the last—he is safe!" the youth dared not disobey any longer. In a moment he was over and up to his waist in a ditch of black and feculent mud, with the slimy timbers of a ship-yard before him, which looked so high and steep that the worst part of their task seemed before them.

Van Huysman, aided by Claude, followed with somewhat more difficulty, and with a splash which seemed to attract the sentinel's notice, for they heard one call out, "Comrade, hear ye that?" Claude almost leaped over with his French agility, and Blood followed. "Fly, fly!—each a separate way," he exclaimed. "If the priest returns to the Queen's palace he will be safe—Claude, look to yourself; Mervyn and I will take refuge in a place in Shadwell. Adieu, all!" And he scrambled up the timbers of the ship-yard with the agility of a wild cat.

"Farewell, my child!—we will meet again," said Van Huysman.

"Every man for himself," muttered Blood, and clutching Mervyn from Van Huysman's embrace, he ran off. Claude and Van Huysman disappeared in another direction, and

not before it was time, for all Alsatia was roused by the report of the firearms. The Friar with the horn, afraid that his betrayal would be discovered, began to blow lustily; shouts of "Help! help! a baily, a baily!" rang far and near—"Sheriff's officers, sheriff's officers!—Tipstaves, tipstaves!"

The tumult was increased by the hoarse braying of the sentinel's horn; windows opened far and near; men rushed out with naked swords and muskets—women with shovels, fire-forks, or any other weapons that came to hand, all shouting and yelling in the direst confusion. Amidst the uproar, the bankrupts and others who had any very peculiar reason for avoiding a rencounter with the ministers of justice, ran desperately to the water's edge, yelling, "A sculler, a sculler!—ten guineas for a boat, a boat!" Numbers of small boats instantly put off to the rescue of these unfortunate individuals, but over all Blood's terrible voice was pre-eminent. A sculler approached, rowed by a gigantic fellow, who, however, kept a cautious distance from the stairs, calling out, "Cash first, cash first!—won't be diddled!"

"Ay, 'tis the only friend in need!" exclaimed Blood, tossing a moidore into the fellow's boat. "Here, here—another at Shadwell Lock."

The sculler's head instantly touched the stairs, and a crowd of miserable fugitives made a rush to enter it. But the colonel knocked them down right and left with his bludgeon, threw Mervyn in, followed himself, and instantly pushed off, amidst a general yell of despair from the crowd. But the colonel's heart was steeled to supplications, and he laughed scornfully as every stroke of the oar placed them at a greater distance.

"The birds are flown for whom the springe is set," he observed. "But I'll be revenged on master fowler Oates some day!—Rogues! I'll warrant, they'll have a good swill at my claret!"

This thought seemed to be very bitter to him, for he dwelt on it almost till they reached Shadwell, which they soon accomplished, as both wind and tide were in their favour.

Blood dismissed the waterman on landing, with a moidore more than his fee, to secure his secrecy, and Mervyn found himself standing on a stone causeway which led to two

or three straggling houses. Shadwell at that period was a mean village, surrounded by marshy fields, and principally tenanted by fishers, and men who picked up a living in various ways on the river. Blood led the way up a narrow miry lane, and paused before the ruins of a house, which, from the black and crumbling beams visible in a bright moonlight, had evidently been destroyed by fire. To Mervyn's great surprise, the colonel stooped and whistled at a sort of trap-door, visible amidst the heaps of fallen rubbish by chinks of light all around it, which had once been the cellar of the ruin. This whistle was answered by another, to which Blood again replied in a very peculiar tone; a noise of unbarring was heard, the trap-door slided back, and a woman appeared on a flight of stone steps, anxiously shading a torch, which she carried so as to throw its full light on the visitor's face. She was a tall, masculine creature, with coarse shaggy features, very visible tokens of a beard, and an arm which, being bare to the elbow, displayed a sinewy strength not usually appertaining to the fair sex.

"In the devil's name! who,—what—why?" was her laconic but expressive address.

"By the Lord Harry! but I should know that voice!" exclaimed the colonel, examining the Amazonian attentively. "Agad! but can it be? Yes, it is—and yet no, it *is* impossible! Why, Tom Hunt, Tom Hunt, have you forgotten me?"

"Adzooks! what—by daggers and pistols, the great colonel himself!" exclaimed the seeming lady, rushing up and giving Blood a hug which almost made him cry mercy. "Od's bodikins and tripe!—why, colonel, colonel, if you an't as welcome as Easter offerings to a starved curate, hang me—that's all. Hollo, boys, hollo, below there,—the colonel, the colonel!"

This gladsome shout seemed to break a yelling chorus of some strange melody which resounded from the cellar below. There was a dead silence, and then a voice shouted, "I say, Moll, Moll! what's the blare? Are the hookers there?"

"No, no, boys; all sound as Paul's steeple—the colonel is come to see us!" returned the Amazon.

"Whom have you below, Hunt?" said Blood.

"Oh, only the gang—Parrot, Captain Mason, Carstairs,

Rumsey, and one or two other right-down devil-blossoms," replied the disguised ruffian. "All's safe as one o'clock on a frosty morning when the watch is asleep. Come down, come down, worthy colonel. But what's the squeaker ? "

" The young useful of whom I spoke," replied the colonel. " Never mind perusing him now, Hunt ; he is in the blush as yet. Lead the way—but how, in the negro's name below, came you in such a trim ? "

" Oh, it's all about that unpleasant business of the Aldersgate miser—that fool, Red-Nose, knocked him on the head for squeaking, you know," said Tom, with a grin. " But see how I can put it on ! Come, gentlemen —this way, gentlemen ! La, an't you welcome though— la, though ! " And imitating the mincing step of a chamber-maid, the Amazon guided them down a flight of stone steps, some of which were very loose, into the haunt below.

As they descended Mervyn formed a clearer notion of the society in which he was to mingle. It was in a large cellar, evidently once in use as a marine warehouse, the walls bare, black, and dripping with damp, although there was an enormous sea-coal fire blazing. Several rough-hewn tables, chairs, and stools were the only furniture, and a motley collection of men and women were engaged playing at dice, drinking, swearing, and smoking in a kind of brown mist, the exhalations of which almost choked Mervyn. The dresses of these gentry were as various and incongruous as possible. Some wore the richest velvets, tricked out in all the flashy finery of the day ; others were in rags and tatters ; but a perfect equality seemed to reign among them.

Blood's appearance attracted immediate attention ; and no sooner was he recognised than a loud, long and vociferous cheer vented the delight and enthusiasm of the company. The colonel received these honours with the calm indifference of one accustomed to them, shook hands with some few, and assumed to the whole band a tone of mastery and chieftainship which seemed implicitly admitted.

" Well, gentlemen," he said, as soon as the first uproar had subsided, " thanks for your kind reception, which must needs be disinterested enough, for here is my purse " (and he threw an empty one on the table). " Boys, I must have this filled again. They have hunted me out

of Alsatia—me and my son—but, 'sdeath! they shall find they had better not."

"I have only a moidore, but that is yours, splendid colonel," exclaimed Tom Hunt. "Pish! the fiend take it, I have only the change of one. I gave seven shillings to a watchman to let Parrot loose."

"And so he did. Jack Parrot is not the man to forget it," said a long lean individual near a wooden bowl, the contents of which he seemed somewhat the better for.

"All we have is yours, colonel," shouted another ruffian. "I'll cut the rascal's wizen that says you nay, even if you want the skin from his back."

This threat, or perhaps some other motive, instantly produced a display of purses.

"No, no, comrades. Tom Blood is not the man to take charity, even from the men he has made," exclaimed that worthy. "So long as the world produces fools to sow there will be wise men to reap; and these pistols of mine shall yield me as good a rental as the clearest estate in England. So pocket your purses again."

"We must to the old project, colonel. I am sure 'tis almost rotten-ripe," said Tom Hunt, with a sly look.

"Hush! the May bloom is fresh," said Blood significantly. "Come, gentlemen, be seated, and go on with your jollification. Methinks I heard some song a-roaring; if so, roar on. I am in good tune to be your chime-master, for when a man is desperate he should be merry, having nothing to fear."

The new guests seated themselves, and a mug of punch was handed to each; after which, at Blood's repeated request, the song was resumed, Tom Hunt leading it off, and the rest joining in a boisterous chorus. When it concluded, drinking and riotous conversation became the order of the feast.

Mervyn soon felt the soporific influence of the dense atmosphere into which he had entered from the fresh cold air of the river, and nodded in his chair. This was observed by Parrot, who had paid him considerable attention, and kindly spreading his cloak on a bench, he invited him to repose. This invitation was eagerly accepted, and in a few minutes Mervyn was insensible even to the noise and tumult around him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

COLONEL BLOOD'S PLOT

Some hours elapsed ere Mervyn woke from his deep slumber of exhaustion, and when he did, the morning light was streaming in through the cracks in the trap-door above. The noisy company had, however, all departed, and only Blood remained, who was anxiously superintending a steak as it broiled on the hot embers. Mervyn felt feeble and giddy, and went to seat himself by the fire, shivering rather from illness than cold.

"How pale thou art, child!" said the colonel, in a kind tone. "Courage! Fortune must be nigh weary of making us her footballs, and the verge of all is the brink of good. We will not rest stewed up in this cellar, for thou wilt wither like a rose deprived of light. An it like thee, we will out and enjoy this bright morning on the water, when we have broken our fast on a collop and stoup of ale."

"But shall we not be pursued and caught by those bloodhounds?" said Mervyn, sadly.

"Troth, no, if my project holds good," replied the colonel. "But we must forth in disguise. Thou art so fair and beardless a youngster, that I intend thee to pass for a girl; and for myself, I shall assume the garb of a doctor of divinity—not the first wolf in sheep's clothing, Mervyn!—and so transmogrified, we may breathe God's air, and warm us in His sun, at freedom, like—ha! ha! the thought will out—like serpents."

"Anything to escape from this loathsome robber-hole," said Mervyn, hastily.

"Yea, and I have a project afloat which may perchance sail with thee into a good harbour," said Blood, musingly. "What think you, boy, if I get you a snug refuge under the very whiskers of the law itself—a lodging in the Tower?"

"I can get my board too at Newgate," replied Mervyn, doggedly.

"But as a prisoner—now I mean you to be a guest," said Blood. "You must needs think, Mervyn, that, as a father, I am grieved to see thee thrown among the villanous men with whom my persecuting fortune herds me. Well,

I have an ancient friend who is marshal of the—of one of the Tower wards, and who, for the love he bears me, will give you secret entertainment till this storm blows over. Oates will never think to look for thee there, no more than a cat would expect a mouse to nestle in her fur. At all events, we will to the Tower to-day, for by Heaven, the most dangerous spots in England are now the safest for us!"

There was a desperate energy in Blood's tones which struck the youth as rather superfluous, but there was something so delicious in the idea of quitting the ruffianly society in which he had lately mingled, that he did not venture to analyse the hesitation with which he replied to this fine project.

"Agad, boy, you shall understand me better than hitherto," continued the colonel. "I have but showed thee the dark side of my character, but there are lights in it too. Desperate as I am, hunted by men's detraction and hate even to death, I will show thee how brave men take Fortune's kicks—even with a smile. I will have my jest though I die on't—that is, if Hunt can get the disguises; if not, we must stay here, and die like rats in a mortiсed hole."

"But what jest do you speak of, colonel? Alas! your jokes in general wring blood, not laughter," said Mervyn.

"Why do you not call me father, boy?" said Blood, sternly. "Methinks I have done enough to deserve it, even if nature had not conferred it. But fear not, Mervyn —this joke shall be all laughter and no harm, unless men split their sides to hear it told."

"But what is this joke?—on whom is it to be played?" replied Mervyn, impatiently.

"It is to serve as a merry prologue to your introduction in the Tower," said Blood, with seeming carelessness. "But I doubt if the disguises can be procured for our masque."

"All's right, all's right, glorious colonel! here they are!" interrupted a loud voice, and a bundle rolled at their foot, followed by Tom Hunt, still in his woman's garb, and frisking merrily as he descended.

"The disguises, Tom?" said the colonel, quietly. "Well, well, don't open it yet—the steak is done, and, with a few mugs of your best *aqua vitæ* to wash it down, we will take in provender for our enterprise."

"But this jest—what is it?" insisted Mervyn, with an involuntary feeling of distrust.

"Well, boy, as I was telling thee when this rough wench broke in upon us," said Blood, quietly lifting his reeking steak from the embers. "What was I saying?—some few months agone—have you never a wooden platter, Hunt?—I was chatting with my old schoolfellow, Mr. Edwards, in the Tower, about the fortunes of my life, or rather misfortunes, and I was somewhat emptily boasting of the many disguises I had assumed, and how I could deceive any man breathing twice in the same hour. Whereupon old Talbot said that no man that had once seen me, and heard my voice, could mistake me again, though as arrant an ass as Balaam's. To which I swore lustily that I could cozen him, for as wise as he thought himself—and thereupon we wagered a supper and canaries to be eaten and drunk by as many friends as I could bring with me, provided myself was undiscovered."

"Excellent, excellent!" said Hunt, rubbing his hands joyfully.

"Well, to amuse myself even in these late great distresses of mind," continued Blood, "I put my project in execution. I disguised me as a doctor of divinity—you do remember, Mervyn, how oft and in what strange garbs I left you in Whitefriars?"

"Marvellously well!"

"About a fortnight ago—Tom Hunt, thy brandy is shamefully adulterated with water; 'tis enough to damn thy vintner!—nay, not so long ago—I went to the Tower in that disguise, with a woman whom for the nonce I called my wife, under pretext of seeing the curiosities. The plot took marvellously. Edwards had no more recognition of me than Adam. While we were looking at some of the toys there, my wife feigned to have a qualm in her stomach, and I prayed the old gentleman to send for some spirits, intending to make a jollification and discovery. But unfortunately some strangers came in, and I was obliged to defer my explanation. Old Mother Edwards was very civil to my wife, and invited her to repose on a bed upstairs, so that when we parted it was with every mark of civility and mutual good-will. This good success put it into my head to carry the joke out. A few days after, I went with a present of four pair of

the best white scented gloves from my wife, with her grateful compliments. In short, being well entertained, I repeated my visits without discovering myself; so that at last the old man took me in so hot a friendship, that having a son, who was daily expected home from sea, and who wanted a wife, he proposed to me, if I had a daughter, to make a match between the families. I was foolish enough to pretend I had one—a fair, likely wench, with a good two hundred pound for fortune, left by some grandame. To make a long story short, we fully agreed upon a match between the young people, and in token thereof called each other brothers. Yestermorn it was agreed that I should bring my daughter to be introduced to her relations elect—and I at first thought of bribing some young slut to play the part. But on deliberate advice, methinks that were carrying the joke too far, to show them a—a—such a body as a daughter-in-law; so I have determined to take you, Mervyn, in disguise. Then, after a little becoming mirth, we will reveal the whole sham, and the good-humour thereby engendered will float thee at once into the good graces of the honest couple. Wilt go, lad?"

"If it be, as you say, only a harmless frolic," said Mervyn, somewhat dubiously.

"If!—bah, what *if* when the great colonel pledges his immortal word 'tis so?" said Tom Hunt, in a lofty tone. "At all events, youngster, you are his son, and obedience is a filial duty. But how will you play your own part, child, as a Puritan parson's daughter? Canst amble tediously, turn up thine eyes on occasion, leer with sanctity, and play the devil with the saintly grimaces of the pure ones?"

"I can at least hold my tongue—a virtue which may be practised with approbation by all women," said the youth, smiling. "In short, I will be anything, or do anything, to escape from this dungeon."

The breakfast was soon dispatched, and they proceeded to dress. Mervyn's toilet was soon completed, and elaborately finished off by Hunt, who boasted of his skill in female habiliments. A plain looped petticoat of brown stuff concealed his nether garments: neat grey stockings, black buckles and high-heeled shoes, finished his lower apparel. Stays of dark fawn-coloured silk, well padded,

a clear-starched collar, and a little precise coif, beneath which his dark hair clustered in thick rings, completed his garb. Blood put himself into his disguise as a doctor of divinity; he wore a little band, a long false beard, a cap with ears, everything except the gown, instead of which he had a black cloak of capacious width. Thus equipped, and having made some agreement with Hunt, which Mervyn did not overhear, they sallied boldly forth from their subterraneous hiding-place.

Blood took a boat directly, and ordering the waterman to keep on the Surrey side of the river, and not to hurry himself, they sailed merrily out on the bright waves. It was a clear frosty morning, and the keen bright air braced Mervyn's nerves, and restored the roses to his pale cheeks. Blood wrapped him in his own cloak, and reclining indolently on the prow, seemed lost in a deep and gloomy meditation. Mervyn was rather surprised to see that they floated past the Tower, and that Blood gave directions to land them at Whitehall Stairs; but he was afraid to speak, lest he might attract the waterman's observation.

They landed at the place indicated, and walked up a road which led to Chelsea Fields. Crossing two or three hedges, they reached a watering-place for cattle, formed by a very deep pond overhung by weeping-willows, white with the morning frost. As they approached, Mervyn perceived two or three horsemen grouped together, and handing about a large tin bottle, to which each in turn seemed to apply his lips with great devotion. They were all dressed as substantial Puritan burghers of the time—of that sober class which abhorred all court fripperies, as so many lime-twigs set by the devil to ensnare men's souls. One of them held the rein of an unoccupied horse, of powerful make, as seemed necessary, for it carried both a saddle and a pillion, as if for two to ride.

"Here they are, notable brethren of the faith, Lord-seekers, all!" said Blood, laughingly. "Look—know you not, Hunt?—By'r lady! he looks the surly covenanting knave, better than the dimpled wench of a hostelry.—Ho, Parrot, all right?"

"As Paul's clock, when it isn't wrong," replied that gentleman. Mervyn looked in mute surprise at the colonel for an explanation.

"Oh, it is as Parrot says, all right," he said, carelessly. "To horse, Mervyn!—I sent a message in the early morning to Edwards, telling him I meant to bring my daughter and some of my friends with me to see the Tower, and, as I have made such visits ere now profitable to him, he has no gainsay."

Though not thoroughly satisfied with this explanation, Mervyn could offer no objection, and Blood, laughing hoarsely, lifted him on the pillion, where he sat sideways like a woman. Blood then vaulted on before him, and, giving his horse a switch, the whole cavalcade set off at a sober pace to London.

Passing over a succession of fields and marshland, on a very rude road, which, however, was luckily hard frozen, they entered the Mall, and so to Charing Cross. As they jogged on, Mervyn could not help remarking the different styles in which they were treated by the different classes of men they encountered, which might have served as an illustration of the conflicting temper of the nation at the period. The men of plain, precise garb—the substantial middle-class burghers—treated them with respect; paid principally to the puritanical cut of Blood's coat, which intimated that he was one of the expelled nonconformist clergy. On the other hand, the glittering young cavaliers, whom they met taking their morning ride in all the pomp of velvet and embroidery, never failed to treat them with some satirical observation, some tart gibe, and often studied rudeness, which the colonel bore with singular patience and composure, but which made Mervyn's blood boil. The observations addressed to him personally were such as frequently to bring the blush to his own cheeks, as it might to the young maiden's he personated; but Blood took no notice, and exhorted him to do the same.

"Why, child," he said, "if a man had a mind to punish all the rogues and scoundrels he might meet in this age, all London would go to bed with broken bones; and, if he kept an even-handed justice, himself too."

He then gave the youth some instructions as to how he was to behave himself in his assumed character, and Mervyn thought he dwelt somewhat superfluously on the matter.

The colonel avoided Fleet Street, by threading a number of narrow lanes on the banks of the river, and they emerged

at last in Thames Street. Thence their way to the Tower lay in a long straight line through a crowded, populous, and splendid street, by no means resembling the Thames Street of our day, where commerce has usurped the place of fashion. Blood seemed desirous of shunning observation, and rode as fast as the crowded state of the streets allowed him, until they suddenly emerged on a wild broken land, strewed with a few neglected gardens, which bordered the Tower moat. The battlemented rampart and hoary towers streaming with banderols, the walls bristling with cannon, roused Mervyn's admiration, and elicited an exclamation of delight from him. But the colonel suddenly checked his horse, and turning, with a face deeply flushed—"Why, how now, urchin," he exclaimed; "what the fiend ails thee?" He spoke with such asperity, and even fierceness of tone, that Mervyn ventured no reply. After a moment's consideration, Blood called to his companions, and said they would ride to the Iron Gate, where he was known. They jogged on at a slow pace along the shore of the river, which then consisted of a raised causeway in a very neglected state, and reined up their jaded horses at last under the frowning battlements of the Iron Gate.

A warder came forward, and respectfully greeted Blood, under the title of Dr. Andrews. The reverend gentleman then alighted, and assisted his fair companion to do the same, inquiring how worthy Master Edwards was, and that excellent woman, his wife. The warder answered that Edwards was marvellously well, considering his years, and all the better for his hopes to see his reverence. "Ay, ay, my brother and I are excellent friends, and hope to be better," said Blood, with a slight smile. "I have brought some brethren, d'ye see, friend Giles, to have a stare at those carnal man-glittering stones, whereof your master hath the keeping, as well to marvel at the greed and vanity of human worms, as to gratify the woman-curiosity of my young daughter here. Good help us, Master Giles, are there any news of this sea-bridegroom of ours?"

"Captain Edwards of the *Sea-shark*? Oh, I warrant me, master," said the warder. "His ship came up to Wapping last night, and waits only a good tide to bring her to the Tower."

"Ay, indeed?" replied Blood, hastily. "Well, well, we must be getting our preparations hastened, then. Thou

wilt guess, Giles, what is forward when I tell thee this gentleman with the inkhorn at his belt is our scrivener, and the rest I have brought as witness to a certain matter between my brother Edwards and me."

"Ay, marry, good faith and indeed!" said the warder, indulging himself with a stare at the bride, who bashfully drew on her coif. "No offence, miss, but can't help wishing you joy. Good lack, Master Andrews, we shall have a marriage feast soon?"

"And fear not but thou shalt have an invitation to the wedding, honest Giles," said the doctor. "Prithee, charge not thyself with our horses, they are too joint-weary to run away, for we are wayfarers from out of Samaria—I mean we have ridden far. Come, daughter, I trow we shall find Master Edwards in his usual snug tabernacle?"

He turned as he spoke to give his arm to Mervyn, and his cloak opening an instant, the latter thought he saw a pair of pistols in his girdle, and a long dagger—almost rapier. However, as this was only in accordance with the desperation of his character, he took little notice of the circumstance. The whole company now entered the gates, and crossing a courtyard in demure silence, passed the White Tower, and came on a smooth square of grass, used as a bowling-green by the garrison. A warder whom they questioned told them that Master Edwards was at his usual place in the armoury, and respectfully opened a massive postern, saying it was a shorter way. As they entered, Blood whispered, in a tone more calculated to excite terror than caution, "Boy, play thy part well till I say *the game is up*, and then do as thou shalt see me do."

Mervyn had no time to ruminate on the meaning of these words; they had entered the horse armoury, and the long array of those iron statues of war instantly attracted his attention. The effigies of many a kingly warrior stood before him, arrayed in rich suits of the armour worn by some of them on the great days which make their names eternal in the memory of England.

At the opposite end of the armoury, chafing his hands over a charcoal brazier, and talking merrily with the warder, sat a hale old man, still fresh and bluff in the cheek, though eighty winters had sprinkled their snows on his head. Seeing strangers enter, he came to meet them at a strong

hearty pace, and almost instantly changed his look of inquiry into one of joyful welcome.

"Why, God bless us!" he exclaimed, "you are late, brother Andrews, you are late—but all the welcomer, like a tardy spring. Welcome, welcome all, and pretty little mistress too—nay, not so little neither!—daughter mine that is to be. Nay, you cannot refuse an old greybeard."

And so saying, the old man sealed his welcome with a kiss which he bestowed on the blushing and trembling bride-elect.

"Ay, ay, sweet Mistress Alice, there's grace in a blushing face," said Edwards, benevolently smiling. "You must excuse us old fellows; we are by and gone, by and gone—but every dog has his day. An now I were my boisterous sea-son, you might blush with a cause. Lord love you, child, how he will dote on you! Why, Master Andrews, Master Andrews, she's a world handsomer than we bargained for—tall, tall, very tall! Well, well, last time my boy was on dry land—I call him 'boy,' miss, though I warrant he's as stout a man as ever slashed cutlass into a French skull. Well, as I was saying, as he was a-going aboard, 'Father,' says he—I'd been a-talking to him about a wife, you know,—'what you say about the comfort of a home and a wife is all very true, I dare say, and if so be you'll pick me out one, why, I'll marry her when I come back, and that's enough.' Marry, mistress, you have only to pray for a Spanish war, and you'll have a lapful of ducats before I can say Jack Robinson, for he's as brave a seaman, though I say it, as any lion of them all—there!"

Mervyn had by this time, with his natural vivacity, entered into the humour of the scene, and replied, with proper puritanical drawl, "Ay, truly—la, a lion!"

"But where is good dame Andrews, doctor?" said Edwards.

"Oh, we dropped her on the way; she has found the stairs to your lodgings which you so kindly taught her, brother," replied Blood, "and I warrant me now she is in full gossip with your worthy good wife."

"Marry, then, by'r leave, we'll join 'em, doctor," said the old man. "I warrant me too we shall find some small matter that will do ye good after your cold ride."

"Nay, first we will have a peep at your baubles, Master Edwards; the ornaments hung by the idolatry of men on

the golden calf of royalty," replied the colonel. "These gentlemen here are all from the country, and fond of a stare, except Master Hunt, the scrivener, who hath his deeds with him. And so, after the sight-seeing, we can upstairs to business without interruption."

"With marvellous great pleasure," said Edwards; and Mervyn observed that Hunt screwed his hard features into a momentary but very expressive leer at the colonel. "But maybe first, as 'tis a new curiosity, ye'll go and see the graves of little Edward V. and his brother, in the Bloody Tower?"

"La! they whom horrid Crookback murdered?" said Mervyn. "Marry, yes, above all things; 'tis as piteous a tale as Robin-redbreast and the Babes in the Wood—la, yes, and indeed."

"I'faith," muttered Blood, "I care not to see such a vain traditionary hole, where suckling Catholic kings were thrown or not, as the tale varies. It savours of Romish superstition, Master Edwards, and I do think my friends are more anxious for a gaze at the glittering baubles of state."

"Ay, in good sooth, are we," began Hunt, eagerly, when the colonel interrupted him with a look. "Nay, nay, then, not that I care."

"Plenty of daylight for them too, doctor," said Edwards, good-humouredly. "But our young bride hath her curiosities, and 'tis not for her new father to balk her."

So saying, he led the way to a postern which opened into a quadrangle of the castle, and Blood, reluctant to show his unwillingness, followed quietly.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE REGALIA

A short walk brought them to St. Katharine's Gate, of whose warder Edwards borrowed a bunch of massive keys, and they entered at the little door whence, eleven years past, Duval had carried the unconscious Mervyn from his father's arms, for ever. The deep gloom of the vaulted apartment into which they entered, with its dusky cross-

lights from above, struck Mervyn with a vague feeling of terror. He turned, he knew not why, to Blood, perhaps to be reassured by his presence, but he was so surprised at the paleness and strange workings of his face, that he did not speak. Blood's eyes, too, carefully avoided his, but he made an angry gesture, as if conscious of the youth's observation.

Edwards pointed out a small square excavation recently made, whence he stated the bodies of the murdered princes had been conveyed to Westminster for burial. He related all the circumstances of the discovery with garrulous circumlocution, pleased with the earnest pathetic face with which Mervyn listened.

"Yea, daughter," he continued, "'tis all as true as the daisies; and more than that, though I am not one that puts faith in idle Romish superstitions, still I must say folks *do* report this Tower is haunted. I never put my prisoners here (for I'm marshal of the prisons too), nor will I unless we get overstocked, which is like enough to happen if godly Master Oates continues his foraging among the Papists."

"What manner of spirits haunt it, sir?" said Mervyn, with feigned simplicity. "The two sweet little murdered kings?"

"Ay, in their bloody night-robes and minever hoods," said the colonel, in a bantering tone.

"Nay," replied Edwards deliberately—"nay, but the ghost of a very great Catholic noble, who, some say, committed suicide in the room above."

"Who some say! Nay, sir, he did," exclaimed Blood, vehemently.

"How know you, brother, of whom I speak?" said Edwards, somewhat angrily. "Faith, doctor, you know not that I speak of the great western earl Aumerle, or you would know that men entertain great doubt whether he was not murdered."

"Aumerle!" repeated Mervyn. "How strange it is that, go where I will, this name still meets me."

"Good troth, doctor, they say he committed suicide," pursued Edwards, resolutely, "but I have my own reasons for thinking otherwise. I was on the guard here that night, and nothing shall ever persuade me that it was the earl's voice which answered from within when we heard the groaning."

"Nonsense, brother; be not uncharitable to deem so," said the doctor, prying into the princes' grave so as to shade his face from Edwards' torch.

"Say what they will, I know what I know," said Edwards. "There were men—and women too—who longed for his death, who had cash to buy the bloody hands fit for such a task."

"Ay, ay, neighbour, but gold cannot bribe stone walls," said the colonel, sharply.

"I doubt, doctor, they dealt with the devil or Colonel Blood, which is much the same," said Edwards, drily.

"Good lord, brother, I do hope you have not taken the papistical court ill-will against that honest gentleman and true Protestant," said Blood, with a bitter smile.

"Honest devil and true runaway from all religion and decency," exclaimed Edwards. "Never stare, madam; I know the man, and of all the black execrable villains under Heaven's light——"

"Fie, fie, Talbot Edwards. I relish not such words in any Christian mouth," said the colonel, hastily.

"Nay, I meant not to offend," replied Edwards. "But whosoever speaks of such a scoundrel with any patience is already more than half one himself."

"But what folly is this, brother?" said Blood, observing Mervyn's look. "Why should you accuse Colonel Blood, or any man, of taking a life which was already forfeit to the state?"

"To prevent certain secrets from oozing out—what do I know?" said Edwards. "There's my lady his wife that was—she that hath since married the Lord Howard—more shame to her. I warrant she knows more of the matter than she dare mention in her prayers."

"Well, and what did you do with this grand earl's carcase? The jury charged him to be staked as a *felo-de-se*, methinks I have heard," said Blood.

"He is not far off;—there he lies, poor noble gentleman," replied Edwards, unbolting and throwing back a small postern which opened on the steep bank of the Tower moat. The bright sunshine streamed on a long mound running parallel to the ditch, and overgrown with weeds. Blood started as if he had seen a tiger crouching at him.

"We buried him there," continued the old man mournfully—"there, during the confusion of the great fire. The

jury's warrant sent him to a crossroad—for they were all red-hot Anabaptist men—but as this is a sort of cross-road between our liberties and the city's, I made bold to read the order mine own way. He has no coffin, no shroud—nothing but a grave."

"He must have been a tall man," said Mervyn.

"Marry, but for the folly of the thought, I could say your mother had seen him, Mistress Alice," replied Edwards. "If your hair now were a shade blacker—yea, if it had the blue blackness of the raven, and your nose were a little less Greek at the end, I could say now——"

"What, buried *there*?—no funeral rites, not even a coffin?" interrupted Blood hastily.

"Buried like a dog, excepting that——" hesitated old Edwards. "But I am sure you'll not blame me, doctor. I could not bear to throw a man into the earth like a dead horse, so I e'en got a Catholic priest to bury him, according to their way, at night—one Father Van Huysman, who was in London then. Heaven forgive me if I did wrong!"

"Amen, and thrice amen!" said Mervyn, whose eyes gushed full of tears. "But if you have done wrong, what heavenly deed was ever wrought on earth?"

"And, see, I put a black cross at his head, and planted the grave with wild thyme—all dead now—but in summer it hath a sweet bloom and fragrance," said Edwards, delighted with Mistress Alice's fervent applause.

"Like your excellently good deed in the nostrils of Heaven," said Mervyn, wiping his eyes. "But now we are here—do, gentle Master Edwards, show us the rooms above where this poor gentleman was—where he died."

"Marry, will I—I think a vast of thee, child," replied Edwards. "And even just as they were left by him twelve long years agone; for all the prisoners do object so strangely to sleep there, that our mild lieutenant presses them not—and they are fallen into total disuse."

"Nay, 'twere too melancholy a sight, brother," said Blood, hurriedly.

"No matter, I would fain see—I love melancholy things," said Mervyn, very eagerly.

Blood glanced angrily at him, but he was already halfway up the stairs, with Edwards. The company followed, and Blood reluctantly brought up the rear.

The keys of these haunted apartments hung in a rusty

bunch on a nail outside the door. Edwards undid the massive fastenings, and they entered the apartments. Everything was covered with dust, the tapestry moth-eaten, but many tokens remained to bear witness that the suite had been occupied by a prisoner of consequence. Blood kept his eye fixed on Mervyn, and was alarmed to observe that he was in a reverie, and looked puzzled.

"A silver penny for thy thoughts, child?" he said, with a forced smile.

"La, now, how curious 'tis!" replied Mervyn. "Yet, in good sooth, could I have dreamed it? It seems to me as if I had been here before, and had seen ye all about me. But there was another, too—one in black, or—nay, truly, I do think it was a heap of hearse-plumes over a marble visage, and——"

"Folly, folly, daughter," interrupted Blood, sharply. "Is yonder the bed-room of this quiet suite, Master Edwards?"

"Ay, ay, come and look in," replied the old man, and he led the way into the darksome, ill-omened apartment we have elsewhere described. "Faugh! things are a little musty here—nothing stirred since my Lord Aumerle's time."

"Yes, too close and musty for me," said Blood, hurriedly. "When you have done your dark gossip, you will find me in the next room."

He then withdrew abruptly.

Both Mervyn and the old man seemed relieved by the doctor's departure, although he left his myrmidons behind. Edwards began by relating the tragical story of the earl's death, much as he had given it at the inquest, and Mervyn listened with strange intensity. Parrot and Hunt, however, showed considerable impatience, and, looking at their large watches, admonished Edwards that time was flying fast. Accordingly they returned to the sitting-chamber.

As they entered, Mervyn glanced at the colonel, who was seated in an old arm-chair, and involuntarily started, though Blood's manner, at the moment, had nothing particular in it, and was merely that of listless weariness. Yet it made him muse, he knew not clearly on what, but some dim and indistinct association passed through his mind. Meanwhile, old Edwards, who noticed nothing, brought out what he called a great curiosity—the fatal instrument found near

the earl's body—which he handed to Blood. The colonel examined it minutely, and then mechanically amused himself by snapping the dagger in and out of its pistol-haft. At this moment a wild and puzzling thought crossed Mervyn's imagination, that he had seen all that passed before, but whether in another state of existence, or in a dream, he could not tell. He looked bewilderedly at Blood, and at his deformed thumb, and their eyes met. The colonel instantly started up. "Tut, tut! Brother Edwards," he exclaimed, "for a bridal party, that shall be soon, you are making us too sad. Show us now your own glittering trinketry."

"In troth, am I—I am to blame," said Edwards. "Come, then, let us lock up these dismal rooms, and pray God they may never again receive so luckless a tenant."

"Amen, father! Amen, indeed!" echoed Mervyn, and in his natural tones, which induced Edwards to look at him for a moment with some surprise. But his suspicions, if any arose in his mind, instantly vanished when he marked the noble expression of the boy's countenance. All followed Edwards to a door which opened again on the bowling-green, which they crossed to the armoury. Mervyn wished to see this curious collection at leisure, but the doctor would not allow it, alleging that Mrs. Edwards and his wife were waiting for them.

The old keeper now produced the three massive keys which fastened the iron door of the regalia-room by as many padlocks. Edwards unlocked them with the slow importance of age, and one of the bolts being rather rusty, he was about to call the warder, who was at the opposite end of the armoury; but Blood hastily prevented him, and Mervyn perceived that his hand trembled as he pushed the bolt back. Edwards then opened the door with a pressure of his knee, and Mervyn stepped eagerly in after him. A blaze of jewels, lighted by a lofty beam of sunshine, almost dazzled his eyes. On tables of crimson velvet, and arranged in pyramids, shone the magnificent regalia of English sovereignty; the imperial crown of Edward III., the globes, the sceptres, the jewelled swords, the golden staffs, the rich fountains, salt-cellars, golden spurs, eagles, all afire with jewels, and shooting out long beams of light. In the centre was the royal crown of England, blazing like a sun.

Mervyn uttered an exclamation of joyful surprise ; but at the moment he heard the door bang, and Blood exclaimed, " Now for it—*the game is up*." At the same time the mock doctor threw his cloak over Edwards's head, and thrust a gag into his mouth, having a plug with a hole to breathe at, which he fastened on in an instant with a waxed leather thong. Hunt at the same time fastened an iron hook to his nose, to prevent him from uttering any sound through that organ. All this was the work of a moment, and in that space the honest burghers threw off their cloaks, and showed themselves well armed with swords and bludgeons. Mervyn knew not what to think, nor whether this scene was part of the joke.

" In Heaven's name, Blood," he exclaimed, " what is the meaning of this ? "

" Peace, thou shallow young fool, or thou shalt find the like," said the colonel, in his terrible tones. " Master Edwards, it is in vain to resist. I tell you candidly we are resolved to have the crown, globe, and sceptre ; if you quietly submit, we will spare your life ; if not, expect no mercy."

Edwards nevertheless made a desperate, because blind, effort to rush to the door and call out, and Blood instantly knocked him down with a wooden mallet, which he suddenly produced. The poor old man, though severely hurt, made a powerful effort to rise and pull the gag out of his mouth. The colonel then belaboured him with his mallet so unmercifully, that the blood gushed in streams through the cloak. But by this time Mervyn had revived from his trance of surprise, and screaming, " Murder ! " as loud as he could, he threw himself over the old man, to cover him from the strokes. This action probably saved Edwards's life. Blood paused in his exertions, and clutching Mervyn, muttered, " Nay, I am provided for your bawling too " ; and he passed a bandage over his mouth, which made him unable to utter a sound. The companions then listened for a moment very earnestly, to ascertain if any alarm was raised—but all was silent. Hunt meanwhile tied the boy's hands behind his back, in spite of his vehement struggles.

Finding all things tranquil, Blood stooped to see if the old man was dead. The unfortunate keeper, probably afraid that these attentions were directed to his throat, made another desperate effort to rise. Blood thrust him

violently over, and coolly observing, "Nothing will quiet him but this," drew his dagger and stabbed him. Mervyn, however, as a last effort, threw himself on the old man's body, and received the second blow in the fleshy part of his own arm. Pain and horror then deprived him of sensation, and both he and Edwards lay motionless as corpses.

"Curse the young fool! we shall have to leave him behind," muttered Blood. "Wipe my dagger, Hunt. Tut! we wanted not the old idiot's scanty remains of life."

Blood then seized the crown, and put it under his cloak. Parrot stuffed the globe into his capacious breeches, and Hunt, taking out a little file, began sawing at the sceptre, intending to break it in halves, as it was too long to carry whole. But while eagerly hastening these operations, steps were heard in the armoury. Blood put the crown in its place, and, muttering to his comrades to be on the watch, went hastily out, leaving the door ajar.

Hunt stood listening at the door with a pistol in each hand, ready to dart out in case his leader required any assistance. He heard a rough hearty voice shout, "Halloa, you there, landlubber, who are you?"

"I am the Tower chaplain, brother," replied Blood, in a mild, insinuating tone.

"Why, man, ye're big enough to be the chaplain of a man-of-war, and preach a sermon in a storm," said the stranger. "But, dammee, don't you know me, then?—though I don't know you, to be sure, not being a great frequenter of your bitter conventicles ashore. My name's Edwards—just come home from sea, and my father keeps the regalia hereabouts. Do you know where he is, your reverence?"

"You will find him upstairs with some friends, and he will be right glad to see you," replied Blood.

"Well, thank'ee—ay, marry, will he—and if I'm not much out of my reckoning, he's hooked me a wife by this time," said Edwards. And, touching his broad hat, he ran down the armoury out of sight.

"Quick march, lads, no time to be lost," exclaimed the colonel, re-entering. "Take each of you something. Damn that sceptre, Hunt, you can't file it. Take the globe."

The robbers obeyed with great diligence.

"And now, boy," exclaimed Blood, seizing Mervyn, who had by this time staggered on his legs, "come along quietly, or stay here and be hanged as certainly as Newgate stands."

"Let us tie the old fellow's hands," exclaimed Hunt.

"Nonsense—it is useless—he is settled," said Blood. "Besides, we have no time. Come."

The ruffian then seized Mervyn by the arm, and dragged him out, too confused to resist. They banged the door after them, Hunt bestowing a parting kick on the seemingly lifeless body of the old man. But they were mistaken in this supposition, for they had hardly hurried past the warder in the armoury before they heard old Edwards shouting lustily, "Treason! murther!"

"On, on!" exclaimed Blood: "a moment lost gives our scrags to the rope! On, boy, or I bury my dagger to the hilt in your ribs!"

"I care not—slay me! Help! murder! help!" shouted Mervyn, who had now succeeded in removing his gag.

"Mervyn, for the love of Heaven, give not your father to the hangman!" said Blood, with great agitation, and glancing at his dagger irresolutely. "Yonder is the main-guard—be silent, or—or——"

"I'll throttle him if he but breathes," muttered Hunt.

"Leave me, then—leave me here, monster!" said Mervyn wildly, "I will not go a step beyond. This is the Bloody Tower: I will die here!"

As he spoke, the voice of young Edwards, at the highest pitch of his stormy tone, was heard on Tower Hill, yelling, "Treason, treason! the crown is stolen!" The door of the guard-room, which they were approaching, opened, and an officer ran out, asking what was the matter. Blood jogged Hunt's elbow, and both clutching the youth by his arms, scudded over the courtyard to the gate of the drawbridge, where a single sentinel was standing.

But the alarm was now general, and the warder, suspecting something wrong from their hurried manner, and hearing the cry of "Stop them! stop thieves!" levelled his partisan at Blood's breast, who was the first of the group. The colonel instantly stepped forward and discharged a pistol at his head, but he fell down, and so avoided the shot.

The drawbridge terminated in a ward-house, and a little

gate at which a soldier stood sentinel. Blood exclaimed, "Come on, he will not resist; he is a coward, by his eye!" and they rushed on. The man instantly threw down his arms, and ran into the ward-house.

The robbers hurried rapidly through the outward gate, and found themselves safely on the wharf. Still guided by Blood, they ran toward St. Katharine's Gate, where their horses waited, joining in the now general yell of "Stop the rogues!" Blood's canonical habit, and the substantial burgher look of his companions, hindered people from suspecting them, and they were close upon the horses, when suddenly a figure darted from a low public-house on the way, followed by three or four stout men with bludgeons, who yelled out, "Here he is—lo, the man! Seize him in the King's name! It is Blood!"

"Hell-hound, take thy fate!" exclaimed the colonel, striking blindly with his dagger at Oates, for it was he, but he avoided the blow by ducking to the ground. The bludgeon-men, who wore the uniform of the city marshal's catchpoles, now rushed forward, and a pell-mell combat began. Blood laid about him so fiercely that he quickly made himself a clear space; but a chance blow levelled Mervyn to the ground at the beginning of the struggle, and, at the moment the colonel had nearly hacked his way to his horse, a crowd of soldiers and warders came running towards the gate. Foremost of these was young Edwards, who, cutlass in hand, rushed upon Blood just as he set his foot in the stirrup. The colonel drew another pistol, and fired it almost close to the sailor's forehead, but, by some fortunate accident, the ball only grazed his skin. They instantly grappled together, and though Blood saw himself completely surrounded, he continued to make a desperate struggle for the crown, in the course of which some of the jewels dropped out. When at last Edwards contrived to trip him up, and wrested the rich prize from his grasp, and a hundred hands clutched him at once, he yielded with a bitter smile, exclaiming, "Well, I am your prisoner! but no matter; it was a gallant attempt, however unsuccessful, for it was for a crown."

"Now Blood, now you are my spoil and my prisoner," said Oates, drawing nigh, his countenance black and battered with last night's work. "Gentlemen, I have a warrant for his body, and that of the young villain

who lies bleeding there. Surrender him to these officers."

"They cannot—they dare not!" said Blood, fiercely. "I am taken within the liberties of the Tower, and am the lieutenant's prisoner only, who dare not surrender me without a warrant from the king's own hand."

"It is true; secure the other villains! they are escaping," exclaimed a gentleman, who now arrived breathless, at the head of a file of guardsmen. It was Sir John Robinson. Old Edwards, streaming with blood which ran over his eyes, and which he was striving to brush away, followed staggeringly. In the confusion of his sight he mistook Oates in his canonicals for Blood, and exclaimed to his son, "Jack, Jack, this is the villain!" Edwards instantly raised his cutlass to strike him down, when Blood laughed very heartily, and said, "Chop away, my lad! you cannot do the world a better service."

"Nay, son, this is the villain!" said the poor old man, still wiping his eyes. "This reverend gentleman is none of them."

During this scuffle and capture, the other villains had made good use of their time. Parrot, indeed, was seized without resistance, but Hunt forced his way to a horse, leaped into the saddle, and rode off, followed by the two other ruffians. There happened, however, to be an empty cart in the street, which turned suddenly short, and Hunt, in striving to avoid a collision with it, ran his head against a barber's pole, which projected in the street. He was dashed from his horse by the shock, but almost instantly recovering, put his foot in the stirrup, and was about to ride off again, when the carter shouted, "This is Tom Hunt, who was in the black attempt on the Duke of Ormonde! Seize him!" He was captured, after a desperate struggle, and conveyed before the lieutenant. But, as the seizure took place out of the Tower liberties, Sir John ordered him to be taken before Justice Smith, a magistrate of the city.

A large crowd had now gathered, which blocked up Tower Hill. Some soldiers picked up Mervyn, whose female habiliments were nearly all torn from his back; his wounded arm streamed with blood, and his dark hair was clotted thickly with the same. Oates had previously recognised him, and claimed him of the lieutenant, in virtue of his warrant; but Sir John would not even hear him.

Oates in vain alleged that he had been on the watch for the prisoners all day, and that he had nearly captured Blood the night before; the lieutenant refused to do anything without the king's express commands, and ordered the prisoners, under a strong guard, to the White Tower, whither he would follow and take their examination. They were accordingly taken off.

Young Edwards proposed to mount some soldiers on the horses, and pursue the other robbers. But the cautious lieutenant would not hear a word on the subject. "Follow them yourself, if you will, Master Edwards," said he; "it is your business, and not mine. I dare not trench on the city privileges, and my jurisdiction stops at these gates. Meanwhile, warders, lead in these horses—they are forfeit to the Tower."

This order was promptly obeyed, and the lieutenant, troubling himself only with the regalia, which he collected and carried with him, entered the Iron Gate. Old Edwards was by this time exhausted with suffering and loss of blood, and fainted in his son's arms, who, uttering as many curses as he could possibly condense into five minutes, and assisted by some of the crowd, carried the poor old man to his lodgings in the Tower.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE COURT OF CHARLES II.

Blood and his young victim were meanwhile conveyed to a room in the White Tower, entirely destitute of furniture, the bare stone walls lighted only with a bull's-eye, set very high in the thickness of the massive stones. Blood walked there with a sort of sullen pride, folding his arms, and scowling contemptuously at the numerous gazers who besieged their way. Sometimes, indeed, he glanced at Mervyn with an expression of remorse, and asked him in a moved tone if his arm pained him; but the youth returned no answer but a look of disdain and hatred. One of the warders, however, humanely bandaged his fast-flowing wound.

Sir John Robinson followed, and the lieutenant commenced with Mervyn. But to all his questions he found, to his great surprise, that the youth kept a resolute and dogged silence, which Blood continued to applaud with his fiery eye and gestures. Sir John grew much exasperated, and inquired of Mervyn if he thought the rack and the thumb-screw were altogether out of date in the Tower. To which Mervyn replied recklessly that he neither knew nor cared.

Finding, as he supposed, that the boy was too well tutored, Sir John turned and commenced an examination of the older prisoner. To the preliminary questions concerning his name and profession, Blood answered readily; but when the lieutenant endeavoured to extort some account of his late exploit and accomplices, he was met by a sullen and impenetrable refusal to reply. Finding, after many trials, that no information whatever could be elicited from the prisoners, Sir John arose in a passion.

"Well, then, Mr. Blood," he exclaimed, "since you refuse to answer even in your own defence, I will to his Majesty, and obtain a warrant from him to get at the truth by other means. You are the King's prisoner, and I trow no factious *habeas* shall drag you out of the King's fortress till the last stone crumbles on my head."

"And tell the King, Sir John," said Blood, with energy —"tell the King that if I am compelled to confess any part of this affair, *I will confess the whole!*"

Sir John seemed struck by these remarkable words and the implied menace. He mused for an instant very thoughtfully, and then walked up to the ferocious prisoner, and spoke some words in a low tone, to which Blood replied in the same. Sir John then exclaimed, with visible agitation, "Sirs, I must to the King on the instant—and look that during my absence no man have speech of these villains. Yet hold—let one stay with them, to see they hold no private discourse—and then again, 'tis not necessary—it can do no harm."

The lieutenant gave these contradictory orders in an obviously puzzled tone. He then stopped short near his secretary.

"How say you, Shelley?—we may leave them alone?" he said. "Gad's sooth! the King needs no more lies learned about him—eh? We are secure—eh? Look ye,

William Lockyer, go to my lady, and tell her not to take more than three warders to cluster her coach. I trow there is no great danger to her precious person between here and Temple Bar, though Claude Duval be abroad."

"Colonel Blood is known to be a man of desperate resolves," said the secretary, dubiously. "It hath been that men of as great courage, on the failure of an enterprise—as for example, Mark Antony at Philippi (nay, Alexandria —'twas Brutus at Philippi)—have laid unlawful hands on themselves, and so cheated the—the—excuse the word, Mr. Blood—the gallows."

"If I had feared the thing—much less the word—I were not now here, master penman," said Blood, grimly. "But as to suicide, dread not that: I am no Roman fool. For myself, I rather mistrust I shall be murdered,—for the burglar oft throws into a ditch the tool he has used, to be rid of its accusing company."

"But then in the Tower, murder is always called suicide," said Mervyn, with a kind of smiling wildness, which showed he had reached that point of desperation whence good and evil seemed indifferent things. Blood bit his lip, and gave a deep sigh, or rather groan.

"Well, Mr. Blood, I will do your errand with his Majesty," said Sir John. "If so be you do knock your brains out against the wall, why, we cannot help it, and Jack Ketch will be spared a tough job. Shelley, post a guard outside, and leave the prisoners alone—yet we will not be blamed if aught happen. Put strong irons on both."

"On that boy, Sir John?" exclaimed Blood. "Load me with an anchor weight if you will, but would you fasten a pennon like a main-sheet?"

"You have heard my orders, Shelley," said the lieutenant, peremptorily. "Not that I would offend you, colonel, for God only knows whether you are now at your worst pass, seeing that fortune is a very wave beneath you, and no sooner casts you to the sands ere she swings you up again to the stars."

The lieutenant's directions were carefully executed, and he himself cleared the dungeon of all but the prisoners, and, locking the door, took away the key in his breast. Mervyn heard the rattle of arms as the sentinels took their stand, and then all was quiet.

A few minutes of profound silence followed. Blood then

raised himself on his elbow, for he had couched down with weariness, and looked around as well as the dim obscurity of the chamber allowed. He perceived Mervyn sitting crosslegged, his hands linked to his fetters, his face pale as death, except his sunken eyes, which were purple and swelled; but it seemed as if he could not shed a tear. Blood looked at him steadfastly, but he could in no way catch his eye.

"Courage, child," he said at last. "While there's life there's hope, and I doubt not to save both thee and myself. Thou dost not know, child, what I know."

"Do you lie on still?" said Mervyn, with bitter calmness. "But 'tis as good as truth. They cannot sink us lower than we are damned already."

"Talk not so desperately, boy," said Blood, earnestly. "I tell thee I know a spell to charm even this demon Death, which thou dost fear so much."

"Thou liest again, father, I fear him not," said Mervyn, with a moment's vehemence. "It is life, miserable, dishonoured, shame-struck life I fear. Oh, that I had a dagger! Thou shouldst see how long I would tarry in this den of wolves which men call earth."

"Boy, that blow was not meant for thee," said Blood, with much emotion. "And for the deed itself, it was done for thee."

"For me! I'll warrant on a sudden impulse of generosity? No, my good father, the plot was old to mustiness—planned, rehearsed, before you dreamed of choosing me your heir."

"I grant it, Mervyn; some such plot lay in a chaos, as it were, in my thought," said Blood. "But deem you I had thrown my life on such a desperate die but for you? The poorest jewel of that crown would have raised you above a beggar's wants; and I was promised wealth, power, pardon, I know not what as my reward, for I pretend not the jewels were to have been my own spoil."

"And whose else, most virtuous, my father?" said Mervyn.

"No matter—I have a better backer than any I dare name," replied Blood significantly. "If the receiver be as bad as the thief, why, then he who wears the crown is nothing better than he who stole it."

"Good faith, this lie outdazzles all ye have yet told," said Mervyn, with desperate calmness.

"It shall be seen if 'tis not truer than those they tell in pulpits," said Blood vehemently. "Strike me dead, if I speak false! And call you that robbery, for a man to take his own property from the hands of unjust guardians—stingy, grudging, conditioning grumblers, like the commons of England?"

"I marvel much I have not club-feet, being the devil's son," said Mervyn wildly. "Well, well, men die but once, that is a comfort. Good night to you, Colonel Blood—good night till we meet again on the gallows."

He then sunk his head back against the wall, and either pretended to sleep or swooned with exhaustion. Blood made no further effort at conversation, but sat for nearly an hour lost in his own gloomy meditations.

This silence was broken by the sudden rattling of a key in the door. Blood started up and glared with wolfish eagerness at the door, while Mervyn scarcely stirred. It was opened, and Sir John Robinson entered, accompanied by another gentleman and seven or eight musketeers.

"Death, I suppose?" said Blood, folding his arms doggedly. "Garrison law—ha! Quick dispatch, and no tales told—eh, Sir John? Well, you shall see to-day, my young steel-crabs, how an old soldier should die."

"You are mistaken, colonel," said the lieutenant, "though, by'r lady, for this hour your life has hung upon the breath of each speaker of a score. Gad, man! the council is at its wits' end what to do with ye. Ormonde and the Butler set were for giving you hot work of it, and a taste of the law martial within the hour, but the king and the jolly Duke of Bucks were obstinate for you; and at last his Majesty hath most wonderfully resolved to see and examine you himself at Whitehall, where are the Queen, her ladies, and the whole court."

"God save King Charles!" shouted Blood. "I did ever know him for a true bully-fellow. Ho, boy, wake; our sun is breaking the clouds. Prithee, Master Lieutenant, put us in some decent trim for the presence, ere we hence."

"The King's orders are to the contrary," replied Sir John. "And—a word in your ear, Master Blood—you have not a minute to lose, lest pernicious counsel prevail, and the world be deprived of your services."

Blood took the hint very sharply, and roused Mervyn himself, who passively submitted to everything; and the

lieutenant carefully examined the locks of their fetters, such was the dread inspired by Blood's ferocious character. This point ascertained, they were escorted under a strong guard to the Tower Stairs, where the lieutenant embarked with his prisoners in his barge, attended by a dozen musketeers, besides rowers. As this strange measure entered the imagination of no man, although all London rang with the attempt on the crown, no particular notice was taken of their passage up the river.

It was noonday when they landed at Whitehall, and entered the great quadrangle of the immense palace, in which was a crowd of coaches, sedans, guards, footmen, and pages, in all the hurry and glittering confusion of a grand day at court. Sir John conducted his prisoners to a guard-room, while Sir Gilbert Elliot, the gentleman who accompanied him, gave information to the King of their arrival. He returned almost directly, with an order to bring the prisoners before his Majesty.

Mervyn felt no emotion on hearing this command, not even curiosity. Had he been ordered to follow the messenger to the block, he would have obeyed without hesitation, so stupefied was he with grief and ill-usage. He scarcely noticed that he was passing through a series of magnificent but monastic-looking apartments, and then through a spacious corridor, or rather gallery, of richly-carved wood, hung with superb masterpieces of the Italian and Flemish schools. They arrived at last, he knew not how, in a large antechamber, in which were groups of splendidly-dressed courtiers playing at various games, and talking with a rapidity and violence of gesticulation which showed the eager interest they took in the topics discussed. The speakers all ceased, however, the moment Blood and his companion appeared, and gazed at them as if at chained beasts.

Blood bore this with impatience, and his ferocious eye seemed to scan the groups scornfully, and then he turned away. The lieutenant, meanwhile, stepped forward and disappeared into another apartment, leaving the prisoners surrounded by their guard. A few moments elapsed, and a personage very richly habited, twirling the gold key of chamberlain, opened the door of the presence-chamber, and called out, "Bring the prisoners forward!" The order was instantly obeyed, and Mervyn found himself in the

presence of the Merry Monarch—but under what different circumstances to those in which he had first seen him, at his jolly ease, in Whitefriars !

The presence-chamber of old Whitehall was of vast extent, suiting the pomp of its founder, the kingly Cardinal Wolsey, ere his overblown fortunes withered away. It seemed as if the apartment had sustained little damage or alteration during the century and a half which had elapsed since Wolsey gave in it that grand entertainment at which Henry VIII. fell in love with Anne Boleyn. The panels and pillars of the wainscot were of black oak, most elaborately and richly carved by a Gothic chisel. The walls were hung with arras, worked out with scriptural subjects, and with a force and beauty almost equal to the cartoons of the Flemish painters from which they were taken. The arms of the cardinal still emblazoned the panes of the deep Gothic windows, and shed a rainbow lustre on the tesselated pavement. The roof was carved with a richness and multiplicity of design which amazed the eye with its beauty and intricacy, and the fanciful caprice of Charles I. had crowded almost every foot of the surface with allegorical paintings by some of his favourite artists.

The furniture, though somewhat used and worn, corresponded in monkish magnificence with all around. The buffets, whence the cardinal's pages were wont to distribute wine and spices to his select guests, were covered with rich plate ; the chairs were of carved ebony gilt, and the drapery of the tables and curtains was of purple velvet, embroidered in tarnished gold with the mingled roses and luces of Bluff Harry.

The most modern part of the chamber was that in which the court was principally gathered around the Sovereign. It was raised by a few steps from the hall, and formed in itself a large circular room, richly hung with crimson velvet. There was a vast fire of cedar-wood burning in a grate of the most beautiful workmanship in gilt bronze ; and with his back turned to a large illuminated window, in a kind of mist of many-coloured lights, sat the King and his Queen, Catherine of Braganza, in gilded chairs of state. He alone wore a hat, which was looped with diamonds, and set rakishly on his head, half aside.

The Queen, a little dark vivacious brunette, attired in the glitter and splendour of a southern toilet, had her hand

upon the King's chair, and lounged easily on the velvet cushions behind her. A great number of ladies and nobles stood around in circles, leaning in various attitudes against the carved woodwork, or standing bolt upright, as weariness or etiquette prevailed. The glittering partisans of the yeomen of the guard, who lined the staircase and lower hall, completed the magnificent array with a fringe of spears.

Mervyn's eye glanced listlessly from the King to the window near which he sat, and which commanded a curious view of the river and landscape on the opposite shore through the stained glass, which gave it a thousand unnatural hues. His gaze returned, without any effort of will, to the grandees surrounding the King. Among these he recognised Shaftesbury, Monmouth, Russell, Howard, and Essex—unwonted forms in the court of Charles II. But the result projected by the real authors of the Oatesian plot had come to pass —the popular faction was in power. Buckingham and Rochester stood behind the King's chair, and leaning against the fireplace stood a tall young man, with a remarkably haughty and sparkling expression of countenance, in conversation with an ancient nobleman, whose rich dress and lofty manner betokened the highest rank. These were the chivalrous Earl of Ossory, and his father, the Duke of Ormonde.

Mervyn looked at these glittering men with a strange feeling of contempt and bursting grief, for it seemed as if all this state and pride were assumed in mockery of his desperate misery. But suddenly his eye fell on a group, which seemed by an electric shock to rekindle all those feelings which were dead and paralysed by the despair in his heart. The Queen's maids of honour stood clustering around her, timid and fresh as just blossoming roses, and among these was Aurora Sydney. She looked pale, but exceedingly beautiful, and her eye, full of wonder and sorrow, seemed to glance at Mervyn; and then it was for the first time that he recollected he was standing in the torn rags of a female garb, covered with gore, mud, and filth of every description, and the hot blood rushed to his pallid cheeks. It was but a moment's feeling, however, for he grew calm and pale as before, with his eyes fixed sullenly on the ground.

The entrance of the prisoners had excited universal attention. All eyes were fixed upon them with eager curiosity, even those of the King himself. Blood seemed in

nowise daunted ; he glanced boldly around, his eye meeting and dwelling for a moment almost scornfully on that of Ormonde. He nodded and looked with a slight curling smile at the Duke of Buckingham, who smiled too, but almost imperceptibly.

" Why, gad-a-mercy ! he stands as stiff as a saint in stone ! " exclaimed the king, after a moment's silence. " One would think he were some brave deserver come to receive the reward of good deeds—and in truth the times are such that they who filch the jewels from our crown must be rewarded by our own hand for the state-thievery.—Well, colonel, you have done for yourself what none of your enemies could do for you, and bold as your former villanies have been, this last beats them all."

" Please you, sire, I was not born to be petty, either in good or evil," replied Blood, with resolute composure.

" None but crimes of a great magnitude content the grandeur of his soul," said Rochester, smiling. " Had you stolen the crown to wear it, Blood, you were now a hero—but only to pick the jewels out—fie ! fie ! "

" Faith, man, thou wouldst have found it heavier wear than a fool's cap," said Charles. " But what bespattered damsel is this thou hast provided thyself withal to share thy tedious hours to the gallows ? "

" I would advise your Majesty not to send her among your maids of honour, lest she turn out a very Achilles in petticoats," said Rochester. " By'r lady, I do believe 'tis the young rogue, Ichabod, whom we—I mean it is a boy in female garb, like one of your father's actresses."

" Is it even so, sirrah ? " said Charles sharply.

" Put him to my Lord Rochester's experiment, and your Majesty may decide," said merry Mistress Gwyn, with a wink, which set the King and the whole court laughing.

Mervyn folded his arms, and tears rushed without restraint down his begrimed visage.

" Alas ! poor youth, he is wounded," said Mistress Sydney, as if involuntarily, and clasping her delicate hands.

" Ah ! sweet Sydney, at your lackadaisies for such a graceless young sweep already ? " said Charles, throwing his head back so as to stare at the young maid of honour full in the face. Then with a smile at the blush he extorted by the length and eagerness of his gaze, he turned to Blood.

"So, colonel, this is your son, and a hopeful pupil in your noble school?"

"He is my son, sire, but as innocent of all offence as a new-created angel!" exclaimed Blood vehemently. "Deal with me as you will, but I swear to your Majesty the youth is innocent even of the thought of wrong."

"He appears in likely company to be so, Colonel Blood," said the Duke of Ormonde, calmly.

"He appears in company of a man who, had not your grace's fortune been better than your deserts, had hanged you at Tyburn like a common malefactor," replied Blood, with extraordinary daring and fierceness.

"What, thou branded villain! darest thou boast of thy crimes even in this presence?" exclaimed the Earl of Ossory, starting from his leaning position.

"Ay, in the presence of the King of Kings!" shouted Blood. "It was a just, valorous, and necessary deed!"

"Nought but *this* presence, nathless, hinders me from hacking thee to pieces, thou monstrous epitome of every villany," said Ossory, sparkling with rage.

"You may say so, safely, my lord;—I am *bound* to hear you!" said Blood, lifting his chains with a scornful smile.

"My liege!" exclaimed Ossory, turning passionately to the King, "you did promise me the garter for my late poor services; but on my knees I beseech you to grant me no other recompense but to set this monster and myself, sword to sword, in a barred room, and if I do not my father justice let men swear that *he* did!"

"I nothing doubt your courage, Ossory," said the King, quietly; "it has been proved, as you well remind us; but when we peril your gallant life, it shall be in a nobler cause."

The Earl of Ossory bowed reverentially, and seemed to calm down like a high-mettled charger gently patted.

"Well, then, Colonel Blood, you do not disavow your share in carrying off my Lord of Ormonde?" continued Charles. "An it had been a fair dame, now, I could have understood an Irish reason in it; but an ancient gentleman, covered with honour and grey hairs——"

"I confess it all, my liege, regretting only that I failed," said Blood, firmly.

"Who were your associates, murtherer—your prompters?" said Ossory, eagerly. "Name them, and by

Heaven I will forgive your own miserable share, for I blame not the ruffian's tool, but his hand ! "

The Duke of Buckingham coloured slightly, and looked uneasily at Blood, who reassured him with an emphatic glance.

" My lord," he said, calmly, " I will never betray a friend's life, nor even deny a deed of my doing to preserve my own."

" Marry, and what offence had I given your most excellent judge, jury, and executionership ? " said the Duke of Ormonde.

" Like Aristides, you offended by your justice," said Charles, with a smile. " An uncommon crime in these days, and therefore craving an uncommon chastisement."

" Your grace wronged me—wronged me in blood and estate," replied Blood. " You robbed me of my property and hanged my brother. His blood was wrongfully spilt, and therefore I avenged it."

" Thou liest, villain ! " exclaimed Ossory. " It was the laws, and not my father, stripped your treason bare and hanged half your kindred, and should yourself."

" I have flown at higher game than any Butler, for as high as you deem yourselves, Earl of Ossory," replied Blood, fiercely. " I do avow that I have been engaged in a design to kill your Majesty. A man can die but once, but I would have a nobler cause than pinching a Butler too hard."

" What, Blood ! " exclaimed Shaftesbury, with some agitation ; " is it possible that such a good Protestant could have been engaged in the late execrable plot ? "

" There are Protestant as well as Catholic plots, my Lord Shaftesbury," replied the colonel.

" We nothing doubt it, Blood," said Charles, with a bitter smile. " But give us some hooks to hang our belief on—the how and the where."

" I was engaged to shoot your Majesty with my carbine from out the reeds at Battersea, whither your Majesty oft resorted to bathe," replied the colonel.

" Gad's life ! and for what most excellent reason ? " said the King, looking keenly at Shaftesbury.

" Your Majesty's severity over the consciences of the godly, your oppression of religious meetings, your merciless procedure with regard to our brothers in the Covenant in

Scotland," replied Blood, with a peculiarly sanctimonious twang, which made all smile.

" Good truth, we are in a cleft stick," exclaimed Charles. " Protestant and Papist—tiger and crocodile—awaiting us on either hand, the Scylla and Charybdis of our state. Did you think to make black puddings of me ? But we have heard you are a good marksman, Blood. How came it we reddened not a stag bullet in Battersea Fields ? "

" Sire," replied the colonel, with ready wit, " as oft as I took my stand in the reeds, and had your Majesty as completely in my aim as a grazing deer, I was struck with such awe and religious terror of your kingly person that I did not only desist from the enterprise myself, but persuaded others, my associates, at the nigh hazard of my life."

" We are bound to you for the capacity of still eating and drinking, friend," said Charles, carelessly playing with his jewelled George and Dragon. " You are a second father to us, since we owe you our life—in fact, more, because not by chance, but voluntary goodness."

" After such a confession, methinks the nicest law would excuse a sudden riddance of such a villain," said Ossory, passionately.

" My good lord," replied Blood, calmly, " the law is not in your hands here, as it was in Ireland when I fell into them. I demand a trial—and let those tremble who have cause to fear what I can divulge."

And his fierce eye glanced rapidly from the King to Buckingham and Shaftesbury.

" Well, sir, what can you do ? " said Charles, biting his nether lip, and affecting to slap the Queen's little brown bejewelled hand playfully from his chair.

" Let the law do its worst," replied Blood ; " I expect its utmost rigour, and am, without much concern for mine own part, prepared to submit to its decrees. But the matter cannot be of the like indifference to your Majesty ; for I am one of a colleagued band of the desperatest conspirators that ever were, who have all sworn to avenge the death of any one that might fall, in the blood of all who are instrumental to it ; and thereupon we have drunk of each other's heart's tide. Wherefore not only your Majesty's ministers, but your own royal person, are in dire and certain risk. But on the contrary, if the gracious dews of your mercy fell on a few it would touch the hearts of many, and

produce a golden harvest of gratitude. We that have been so bold in hate—that have dared so much against your Majesty's vast power—what would we not do, backed by it in love ? "

" You talk, colonel, as if you were lord general of the fanatics, and had all their names on your muster-rolls," said Monmouth, sternly.

" Marry, and who but Colonel Blood ? " replied the worthy. " Send me to Tyburn, and see if ye win more applause from the commons than ye did by hanging the bones of old Noll on a gibbet. There was ne'er a courtier of ye all but trembled to hear his iron old skeleton creak and groan on the tree."

" That was a sight to take the heart out of ambition," said Charles, leisurely crossing his legs. " Marry, to think of Worcester, and look on that old rotten carcase of mortality, that poisoned the very air it once half ruled. But, sirs, if this be true, it is a matter to be looked into. We would fain, if such might be, put a muzzle on the saints, for we stand in as great awe of them as of the Papists, good sooth ! "

" 'Tis notorious the colonel hath a boundless influence over that turbulent imprisoned wind of faction, which threatens every day to make a new earthquake," said Buckingham ; and observing that the King turned eagerly, he added, " and if, sire, my advice as a privy-councillor availed aught, I would beseech your Majesty to show him mercy."

" Please you, my liege," said Sir John Robinson, whom, until this moment, Mervyn had not noticed, though he was close beside him—" Please you, Captain Edwards, the keeper's son, is waiting without, to give his evidence."

" Admit him ; we would fain hear this strange story at length," said the King ; and the chamberlain gave a signal.

The door of the presence-chamber opened instantly, and honest Edwards, still in his smart sea-garb as a buccaneer captain, entered. He looked boldly round, whipped his hat under his arm, and, elbowing his way through the velvet courtiers about, came almost to the King's chair. The chamberlain admonished him to kneel, and kiss his Majesty's hand.

" Damme, why should I kneel ? I don't come a-begging," replied Edwards with blunt simplicity ; and the King, with

a good-humoured smile, extended his hand and shook the sailor's heartily.

"I see thou art of Cromwell's seaworthy school," he said, with a smile, "so never *fâche* thy skullpiece, good briny, with court etiquette. Here is your King's hand; he's glad to see an honest face in his court."

"Why, I don't pretend to know much about politics, please your grace," said honest Edwards, indignant at the titter which ran round; "but this I do know—in old Noll's time the Dutch never showed their noses at Chatham yards, and folks never jumped up from dinner to hear their cannon at Temple Bar."

"Thou art right, man, thou art right," said Charles, somewhat gloomily. "But now tell us by what process you gained that bloody costard—and how fares your father? Is his wound dangerous?"

"Not as I hear on, sir," said Edwards, scratching his head. "I arn't a good 'un at a speech—none of your parliament men—but if so be a plain tale can serve a plain man's turn, here goes."

He then delivered what was indeed a "plain unvarnished tale," but seasoned with such rough good sense and briny logic, that Charles himself applauded his way of narration.

"Well, well, your father will recover of his wound—'tis but a fleabite," said Charles at last. "Meanwhile we will pay the nurse, and order him a hundred pounds on the instant from our privy purse—we think it hath so much in it, Danby?—bah! my Lord Shaftesbury?—If not, you must beg a little of your friends the commons. Well, what is your opinion of this strange matter, my lords? Is the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, my liege, and therefore I implore your mercy for him," said Buckingham. "Innocence only asks justice, and without offence committed, the grandest of your prerogatives is but a sound!"

"Why, then—since the offence is special to ourself," hesitated Charles, stealing a glance at Ossory—"since the man has the honour of being a good Protestant—holy Oates named him with ourself and my Lord Archbishop of Canterbury as the first in the murtherous list of the popish plotters—(look to it, lieutenant, you will be in the next batch of traitors, for denying your prisoners to that blessed salvator!)—since—in short—if it spoil no man's appetite for dinner,

methinks we would fain exercise our prerogative towards this bold and magnanimous villain."

"What, sire!—a villain so attainted of every crime!" exclaimed Ossory—and as he spoke, a distant bell tolled. "A villain noted as the blackest out of hell—when even now—ay, at this very moment—a noble gentleman of your royal brother's household dies a shameful death, for a few ill-scrawled letters!"

"Good troth, Coleman is going!" said Charles. "Yonder is St. Giles's bell ringing him on to Tyburn. Peace to his soul!"

"God grant it, for he is betrayed to death by murtherous perjury!" exclaimed Mervyn. Blood glanced emphatically at him, and Shaftesbury smiled uneasily.

"The Jesuits will soon follow their luckless pupil," said the King.

"I doubt they will ever bring the Provincial to the gallows," replied Buckingham. "I hear this morning that he refuses to plead to the indictment, as against the canons for an ecclesiastic to hold up his hand at a lay tribunal, so I suppose he must be pressed to death."

"Prance's mad lies have done the matter—we must go with the stream," said Charles.

"Hath Prance confessed, my liege, hath Prance confessed?" exclaimed Mervyn, tears gushing to his eyes, and clasping his hands distractedly.

"Yes, boy, Prance hath confessed," replied Shaftesbury, sternly. "He hath confessed the particulars of that diabolic murder, how it was perpetrated by the Jesuits in Somerset House, and the murderers are all condemned save that one obstinate arch-plotter——"

"Names matter nothing," interrupted Blood very hastily.

"I marvel who were left free in England, if all her rogues were as firmly gyved as that honest man!" said the King, with much heat. "Is it you, my Lord Shaftesbury?—Methinks I should then be a stoic king, and reign over myself alone."

At this point in the dialogue a gentleman entered and whispered something to the chamberlain, who announced aloud that the deputation from the Commons, headed by their speaker, waited his Majesty's pleasure to be admitted. It was evidently expected.

"Well, sirs, we must make ready to receive our masters—though my poor ducks must lack their biscuits the longer," said the King. "They come to swear to us that the plot is a good, true, substantial plot, and no fiction of Oates and his friends, with the devil at their head—which we are bound to believe—and thereupon hang, drown, and slaughter our Catholic subjects into true religion. But we will play the king for some few minutes, and tell you, Blood, that in consideration of the service you offer us, we pardon and restore you to all your forfeits—estate and life—for life without estate in England is but permission to be the football of contempt."

"Gracious King! that life is henceforth yours," said Blood, kneeling. "But for this innocent youth——"

"We pardon him too, and all your accomplices; for what we have done in mercy to you we must do in justice to them," continued Charles. "We will see Edwards and his gallant son well rewarded——"

"Nay, my liege," interrupted Rochester, "he needs none; virtue is its own reward."

The accustomed laugh, however, failed to follow this sally, and a deep silence of astonishment weighed on all like a spell.

"What! are ye all struck dumb, like parrots in a thunderstorm?" said the King at last, in a vexed tone.

"Please your Majesty, I don't want a reward if that precious rascal there's to be rewarded too!" burst out honest Edwards.

"Your Majesty grants us a full and perfect pardon for all that is past?" said Blood. "As well Oates's base accusations as that concerning my Lord Ormonde?"

Ossory interrupted the King's reply with some exclamation, but his rage was too great to allow him to proceed, and his father catching his sleeve, exclaimed, "Peace, son, and understand the time!"

Charles's brows rose and puckered, and even Buckingham looked down at the rosettes on his shoes.

"My Lord Ossory," said the King, with peculiar sternness, "know that I expect you and your noble father to imitate my generosity, and forgive this rash man that in which he hath offended you."

"Sire," replied the Duke of Ormonde, with a calm dignity, which sat well on his venerable figure, "if your Majesty

can forgive him the stealing of your crown, I can easily pardon him the assault on my life."

"Ossory, men quote you as an obedient son," said Charles; "you cannot but submit to our pleasure, backed by your father's."

"My liege, I do submit," said the earl, turning white with suppressed passion; "but with this accompanying oath, which I take in your Majesty's presence, that it may be well understood I will keep it. If ever my father comes to a violent end," he continued, turning fiercely on Buckingham, "I shall be at no loss to know the murderer. I shall consider you, my lord of Bucks, the man in default of a better, and pistol you if you stood behind the King's chair!"

"It were braver done, proud Ossory, to meet me on the instant with thy sword," retorted Buckingham, laying his hand on his own jewelled hilt.

"Peace—I do command you both, peace!" exclaimed Charles, starting up. "Where deem ye to be, insolent men? Are ye brawling in a Whitefriars brandy-shop? By Heaven, he who raises his sword in this quarrel makes me his mortal enemy! On your heads, no more of this. Lieutenant, we charge you with Colonel Blood until we can see his pardon expedited; as for the boy——"

"My liege, I charge myself with his welfare," said Monmouth, warmly. "I have some offices yet unbestowed in my army against the Scotch rebels, and methinks he were well removed from the tainted air of the south."

"There is Walsingham writes you for a new cornet to his company in Dumbarton, the three last being killed before they reached him," said Charles, coldly.

"Give me that post, sire; I long to die—at least to die honourably," said Mervyn, with a passionate flow of tears which affected all present, and none more than Mistress Sydney, who wiped her beautiful eyes repeatedly.

"You shall have it, youth, and depart to-morrow," said Shaftesbury, very hastily. "Do you promise, to-morrow, if your wound permits?"

Mervyn bowed, but his breast swelled too full with hysteric emotion to permit him to speak.

"Arms, and accoutrements, and a horse I will promise you at my own expense," said Monmouth gently. "Chiffinch, with his Majesty's leave, will take you now to a surgeon, and then to procure your harness."

"Sirs, you are exceedingly good to the boy," said Charles, with a glance full of suspicion; "but, look to it; I will require his blood of whosoever sheds it, be he who he may."

"Methinks your Majesty does your own blood grievous wrong," said Monmouth vehemently.

"Why, we Stuarts always had a knack of ridding ourselves of troublesome people," replied the King sternly. "Well, Chiffinch, take the charge of the youth till to-morrow."

Chiffinch bowed profoundly, and offered his arm to Mervyn, who seemed scarce able to totter. He knelt, however, to kiss the King's hand with a deep sob, which Charles seemed to hear, for he patted his cheek encouragingly.

"Oh! my King," he exclaimed, in the bitterness of his soul, "think of me not as I seem. I will deserve your Majesty's better esteem, or perish in the attempt." As he spoke, he raised his eyes with enthusiasm upward, and he met those of Mistress Sydney looking at him with singular feeling and attention. "And yours, blessed lady," he added, with a fervour which startled a blush on her fair cheek.

"You have our good wishes too, and dat of our poor persecuted Church," said the Queen in pretty good English, and extending her hand to Mervyn, who kissed it and arose. At this moment the ante-chamber was filled with the deputies from the Commons, and Chiffinch motioned the youth to follow him. Blood made some sort of attempt to speak to him; but he drew himself rapidly past, and disappeared without deigning him any notice whatever.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE POPISH MARTYRS

Chiffinch's first care was to lead the youth to a private apartment of his own, where he sent for a surgeon, and meanwhile washed the wound himself. The son of Æsculapius, however, pronounced that it was merely a flesh-wound, bandaged it, and assured him it would be well in

a few days. Mervyn was by this time completely exhausted with fatigue, and, at Chiffinch's desire, lay down upon a couch, where he slept for several hours uninterruptedly, and awoke refreshed in body and mind.

Chiffinch greeted him with very satisfactory news on awaking. A page from the Duke of Monmouth had arrived, to state his master's pleasure, that Mervyn should sail to join his company in a vessel which contained the duke's own suite and staff, on their way to Edinburgh, and which was to sail in the evening. Meanwhile, Chiffinch had instructions to provide him with all necessaries, such as horse and armour; and, by way of earnest, brought him a complete suit of handsome ashen grey, embroidered in a glittering court style. Attired in this, after a luxurious warm bath, the old page could not help congratulating him on his good looks, and assured him that, with a dash of military success, the ladies would find him irresistible.

They sallied forth, and directed their way to Lambeth, where the duke's armourer lived. A coat of steel lined with buff, crimson hose, and a helmet heavily laden with plumes, formed his uniform; a sword, huge pistols, and a two-edged axe his weapons. Chiffinch was apparently well furnished with money, for he paid for everything, and selected in addition a handsome wardrobe of linen and other necessaries befitting an officer of dragoons; finally, he delivered a purse containing some money to pay his expenses to his regiment, which he said the duke had advanced on his pay.

It grew towards noonday, and they were on their way back to Whitehall, when they stopped for a moment in a court of Lambeth Palace to hear a crier, who was vociferating something to a very motley collection of auditors. He had some papers, which he was selling at a halfpenny apiece, and the title instantly attracted Mervyn's attention—

"The confession of Miles Prance, the popish goldsmith, concerning the late horrid murder of Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, taken in Newgate, with three justices' hands to it!"

Mervyn bought a copy, and Chiffinch, observing with a smile that he must be well able to correct the errata, walked with him up an avenue of poplars, to read it out of observation. A glance convinced him that Oates, or his party, had dictated every word. Green, Berry, and Hill, three

luckless beings, of whom Mervyn had never heard, were named as the actual perpetrators of the murder; Van Huysman, certain popish priests, and by innuendo, the Duke of York, were assigned as the instigators. Mervyn himself figured as a disguised Jesuit, employed by the priest to carry a message to Godfrey, inviting him to see the Duke of York. On arriving at St. James's, it seems he found his highness ill, and was obliged to return without seeing him. The murderers, meanwhile, dogged him into St. Clement's church, where he stayed to hear a godly sermon of Dr. Oates; and proceeding home, passed Somerset House, wherein Prance and the conspirators were concealed. Hill went out and told him two men were fighting within, and that he feared they would kill one another, and entreated him as a magistrate to come and part them. Godfrey unwillingly complied, and had hardly entered ere he was seized by the murderers. The sequel of the tragedy was described much as it really happened, substituting the three accused for the actual perpetrators of the atrocious deed.

"Well, sir, and what is your opinion of this document?" said Chiffinch, not without anxiety.

"Truth and falsehood are so mingled in it, that it would puzzle Œdipus to unravel them," said Mervyn. "But I am sure this confession is extorted rather from Prance's cowardice than villany, for he is rather a weak than a bad man. The innocent blood that is to be shed on his confession shall not flow if I can prevent it. I will see him, Master Chiffinch; I am sure he dare not say before me that these lies are true."

"It would do the King good service," said the page, hesitatingly; "but you run your head against your new patrons, and perchance into a noose."

"I care not; I will venture all," said Mervyn, with a shudder, as the recollection of Godfrey's last scene rushed upon him. "If I cannot bring the murderers to justice, I can at least prevent these men from adding to their victims. Will you with me, Chiffinch?"

"Not I, indeed; I will mix in none of Mr. Oates's matters," said the page, with a shrug. "But if you are bent on trying your luck (and the King's patronage is well worth the faction's, though it triumph for the moment), here is the river and a sculler at hand."

Mervyn instantly hailed the boat, and in a fit of enthusi-

asm, which the wise in this world will have some difficulty in imagining, rowed down the river to London Bridge, where he landed, and walked to Newgate. Turning the corner of the Old Bailey, he perceived a large crowd thronging the gates of the court-house in profound silence, as if expecting some important news. On inquiry, he learned that the five Jesuits were arraigned, and that one of them refused to plead, so that the judges were deliberating on the expediency of forcing him by the PRESS.

In his hurried state of mind, Mervyn took little notice of this circumstance. He knocked at the debtor's door, which was opened instantly, as if some person was expected. Mervyn prefaced his request with a coin, and asked to see Prance, the goldsmith. The Cerberus shook his head, and asked if he had any warrant. Mervyn replied with another broad piece; then, eyeing him with a shrewd smile, the jailer said that as he saw he was a gentleman, and no harm could come of it, he did not mind if he feigned orders and admitted him.

Following his guide through the dreary corridors of the prison, they arrived at a door strongly barred and bolted, which the jailer opened, and shoving in the visitor, secured it again instantly.

A glance showed Mervyn the misery of the scene into which he had thus intruded. It was a high narrow cell, lighted by a gloomy cross-barred slit, rather than window, in the massive wall, totally destitute of furniture save a heap of straw, a blanket, a wooden platter, and a jug of water. On this heap sat poor Prance, his clothes hanging in tatters about him, his head shaven and bare, for he had taken his wig off, and was apparently searching it diligently by way of amusement. He was heavily ironed, and his whole appearance was so wan and woebegone that Mervyn could scarcely conceive how a few months could have made such an alteration.

The prisoner raised his eyes, and starting so that his chains clattered, replaced his wig in manifest confusion, with the tie uppermost. His appearance at this moment—the incredulous astonishment with which he extended his large dirty hand to receive that which Mervyn held out to him, was almost ludicrous but for its horrible ghastliness. It was some time, however, before he could recognise in the well-dressed melancholy-looking youth, the sprightly young

attendant on Oates. When he did so, he burst into tears, and sobbed like a woman for some time, and Mervyn could not refrain from doing the like.

"Don't say anything to me—don't, don't—I know you are innocent," sobbed Prance. "It is all my cursed wife and that monster, Oates. Oh, don't reproach me."

"Not for mine own part, Prance," said Mervyn. "I heartily forgive you—reasonable doubts must exist on your mind against me. But for what relates to those innocent men——"

"Innocent they are for all that I know," interrupted the unhappy goldsmith. "But what can I do? I must do as they bid me, or hang for it. They have tortured me till I prayed for death—screwed my thumbs nearly off—look, sir, the joints are powerless. And how am I to work at my trade if ever I get out again? I can't be hanged, Master Mervyn—I won't be hanged."

"You will be hanged and damned too," said the youth, vehemently. "These villains will make you their tool first, and then hang you out of the way."

"No, no, sir—no, no, it is impossible," replied Prance, shaking all over in an ague of fear. "Oates has sworn to let me off if I confessed as he dictated, and I have, I have! Otherwise I should have hanged to-morrow, for Bedlow witnessed that he saw me standing over the dead body, and——"

"Why did you not confess the truth? The truth does not criminate *you*, Prance," said Mervyn.

"Nor save me from the rope," replied the goldsmith, desperately. "I tried it, but it would not do—nobody believed me. I must either hang or hang others—it is not my fault. Their blood be on the heads of my betrayers."

"Their blood will be on your own head for ever, Prance," exclaimed Mervyn.

"I cannot help it; I will not be hanged," said the goldsmith, doggedly.

"You shall *not* be hanged if you will retract these falsehoods and confess the truth," said Mervyn.

"And bring you that assurance from the duke—the duke?" exclaimed Prance. "Swear to me, Master Mervyn, that I shall be allowed to plead the King's pardon, and I will retract everything—write myself a liar on every wall in England."

" I cannot promise so much—I have no authority. But, Prance, have you no conscience ? "

" Have I a conscience ? Oh, Master Mervyn, what else keeps me in a perpetual hell of thought ? But I have a neck too," he added, with a ghastly grin, " and I will not be choked like a mad dog."

" Deserve well of the court, and I think I can promise you your pardon and rewards too," said Mervyn.

" But if—if I tell things as they appeared to me, I must accuse the Duke of York," said Prance, with mingled eagerness and hesitation. " Come, come, I know you are the duke's page of the dark stairs ; give me some comfort ; now, do ! "

" Accuse no man," said Mervyn, with a somewhat Jesuitical silence on this important point ; " only deny that you know aught of the matter."

" But how can I deny that I was present at the Watergate —that dreadful night—by the Duke of York's orders ? " groaned poor Prance. " Bedlow substantially accuses me thereof."

" The murtherer ! " ejaculated Mervyn. " Can you not allege—are you not porter of those chambers ?—might your duty have taken you there ? "

" At two in the morning ? " said Prance, shaking his bald skull mournfully. " If you indeed, Master Mervyn——"

" I will bear you witness—I have the King's pardon in my pocket," said Mervyn. " The truth will be apparent some day, and thereby shall we all be judged, Prance."

" I will deny my confession—I will say, as I did at first, that I know nothing of the matter," said the goldsmith in a fit of enthusiasm. " Bedlow is a liar, and one witness cannot hang me. If his Majesty will be good to me, I will—I will——"

The rattle of the bolts was heard at this moment, and the turnkey entered in evident consternation. " I can't allow you to stay any longer, my master," he said, sharply. " Here is godly parson Oates a-coming this way, to visit the prisoners, and make 'em confess, and it's as much as my neck's worth to let a stranger be found here."

Prance turned deadly pale, and looked gaspingly at Mervyn, who, after a moment's consideration, briefly, but significantly advised him to tell the truth, and make certain that it should be of no ill consequence to him.

Prance again burst into tears, and Mervyn left him in his dungeon, sobbing like a child.

It was too late, however, to avoid Oates, whom Mervyn now perceived coming up the corridor in canonicals, with a prayer-book open in his hand. Brother Titus did not immediately observe his young *protégé*; he was hurrying on, seemingly much disturbed by the importunities of a woman who followed him.

"Nay, but sweet, holy Mr. Oates, when will you let him out?" she was saying. "The business is going to pieces, the apprentices will not work, and what am I to do if you hang my husband? You know while we had anything, you were always welcome to bite and sup——"

"Avoid me, sinful Eve, lest I crush ye," said Oates, stopping fiercely short. "Would you tempt me to spare whom the Lord hath devoted, and save thy miserable sinner of a husband?—Begone!"

"Master Oates, you *shall* hear me—I will expose you, devil!" exclaimed the woman. "I'll have the mob tear you into chitterlings—I will! They shall know what a hell-fiend their angel is—though it make me the shamedest wretch that ever cast shadow in the sun!"

"Out upon thee!—an thou speak such another word, I will strike thee dumb, slanderess!" shouted Oates, clenching his fist and blackening with rage.

"Bloodhound! thou shalt not even bark, much less bite," exclaimed Mervyn, suddenly darting between them.

"So, so, young master!—a new rig-out?" muttered Oates, relaxing from his menacing attitude. "Here's a pretty premium for cutting the throats of poor Protestant gentlemen!—Well, well, the House shall hear of this—forsooth, a gentleman!—what do you charge per throat?"

"I would do yours for nothing and this instant, but for better reasons than any you can offer, Master Oates," said Mervyn. "But that time is to come—at present go your ways, but dare not even to eye this woman threateningly."

"In God's name you are welcome to the slut and her clamorous tongue," said Oates, with a laugh.

"Dear young gentleman, what must I do?—he will hang my husband!" sobbed Mrs. Prance.

"You have sold yourself to the fiend incarnate, woman," said Mervyn sternly, "and all you can do to extricate your

soul from his lime-twigs is to join your husband in telling the truth."

"Hast thou been tampering with my prisoners?" exclaimed Oates. "I must see to this, good sooth," and he set off hastily, pursued by Mrs. Prance.

He paused, however, a few paces off, as if to secure his person, and turning with a most fiendish leer, "Since you have visited my frends, go visit your own," he said. "Your patron and master, Van Huysman, is in the press-yard, waiting the judge's warrant to be crushed into a jelly." He then moved hastily off.

"Van Huysman!" repeated Mervyn, aghast. "What does he mean?"

"Wiseman or Houseman, or some such name, sir," replied the jailer. "It's the Jesuit provincial as is to be pressed to death, because he won't plead to the 'dictment."

"Van Huysman!" echoed the youth. "It is impossible."

"Wot's impossible, sir?" said the jailer, with evident curiosity. "Why, you can see him if you thinks proper, and will stand a little garnish—it's the prettiest sight as has been in the Gate these ten years."

Mervyn had only power to nod to him to lead the way, and followed with a heart labouring almost to suffocation.

A few turns brought them to a flight of stone steps, by which they entered the press-yard. It was a large quadrangle, the size of which was much diminished by the high walls of the prison, set with gloomy barred windows, which cribbed it in on every side. All these windows were occupied by ghastly-looking beings, roused from the torpor of despair by the expectation of a sight; some even held themselves up at the bars with their chained hands. The yard was filled with a motley throng of prisoners, ragged, squalid, and brutal with disease and crime, who were separated from a group at the end of the court by a chain drawn across. The jailer desired Mervyn to take a stand on a block of stone, which seemed once to have been a whipping-post, whence he could obtain a good view of the exhibition, and he mechanically obeyed.

Some of the persons of the group before him Mervyn recognised without the loquacious help of his cicerone. The two sheriffs, Bethel and Cornish, were there, and a personage whom he concluded to be the executioner. He

was a tall, reckless-looking ruffian, clad in leathern hose, and a doublet of untanned bullskin, worn with the hair out. Mervyn's rapid eye found not, however, the object it sought in terrible uncertainty; but it was evident that some strange deed was in progress. The sheriffs whispered each other mysteriously, and there was a hush among the wild denizens, ominous as the silence of the woods on an overcast noonday. It was a bright morning, but only a glaring blue square of sky was visible from the yard, lit by an unseen sun, and, as Mervyn looked upward, he imagined he was in some wildering dream.

In a few minutes he saw Oates make his appearance near the sheriffs and look round. Their eyes met, and Oates seemed to address some observation to Bethel concerning him; but his attention was almost instantly attracted and fixed elsewhere. A massive door in front suddenly rolled open, and a man, with a mace and open parchment, made his appearance, followed by some soldiers with their partisans fixed. In the midst of this warlike array walked a tall figure with his arms folded, perfectly pale, but serene, and wearing a long black mantle in a monastic style. Mervyn could not mistake him—it was Van Huysman.

For some minutes after this appalling recognition Mervyn stood rooted to the ground, without the power of speech. Meanwhile the crier, for such the maceman seemed to be, after the long nasal "O yes, O yes!" yelled forth the usual proclamation in the King's name. This document announced that the prisoner, having refused to plead, was ordered to be put in a press, with as much iron and stone upon him as he could bear, and more; that the first day he should have three morsels of barley bread, and the next day he might drink thrice of the channel water, but of no spring or fountain; and that this should be his punishment till he died.

A murmur of horror ran through the crowd, and there was a rush to obtain a view of the prisoner; but he did not seem at all moved. The crier then handed his parchment to Bethel, who took it—and there was a deathly silence.

"Master Housman," said Bethel at last, in a faltering tone, "you see, here is my warrant; you have heard it read. I do beseech you have some compassion on yourself, and spare the eyes of Christian men a horrid sight. I do implore you, plead!"

"Not so, Master Sheriff," replied Van Huysman. "By no deed of mine will I acknowledge the infamous and bloody tribunal at which you summon me to plead, only to murder me with forms of law."

"Then must we put the dreadful sentence in force, which but to hear makes our flesh to creep!" said Bethel.

"The will of my Master be done!" replied the ecclesiastic, looking calmly upward. "I am here to bear witness, with my blood, to the truth—the way is thorny, but it leads to heaven!—dark and terrible the gate, but it opens on eternal light and peace."

"Rather on eternal damnation!—perishing soul and body in thy idolatrous misbelief!" exclaimed Cornish.

"Eternity is before me—I am about to stake ETERNITY on the faith which is within me," replied the prisoner, calmly.

"Mauster Rector, I am here in a Christian spirit, to exhort you not to waste both soul and body," said Oates. "Be not as burned wood on the waters, but repent your sins, and——"

"Good Brother Titus, peace," interrupted the priest. "You have betrayed me to this pass; but confine your zeal to the laceration of my body—and know that the sin which weighs heaviest on my conscience at this moment is my preserval of thy life in the forest of Clairvaux."

"Presarval!—fine presarval, forsooth!" exclaimed Oates. "Preserval, says he, to keep me afterwards on bread and water—make me meal by myself, like one plague-struck—call me spy, call me like a lunatic, have me hissed for a liar——"

"Peace, Dr. Oates; this is scarce decent," said Bethel, sharply. "Heaven forbid you should force me, Master Housman, to do my warrant; but if it must be—time draws on. Have you no friends whom you would bid farewell to?"

"Few, and those distant," replied Van Huysman. "But there are some who love me above these tranquil heavens, who are wreathing for these temples, all unworthy as they seem to you, the evergreen wreath of martyrdom. I am ready."

"Father!" exclaimed a suffocated voice behind, and the Jesuit, starting round, received Mervyn in his extended arms.

"Nay, the most loved is nearest," he said clutching the youth to his breast, and suffering him to weep, in a paroxysm of grief, for some moments, during which all kept a deep silence, but he shed no tear himself.

"My son," he said, at last, gently loosening the youth's embrace, "you have yielded sufficiently to the weakness of humanity, show now its strength. This is well; thou art arrived to witness how a Catholic soldier of the cross lays down his armour, the battle being fought, and sunset come."

"Father!—you do not, you cannot mean to rush madly on this terrible death?" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Not madly, but most rationally, Mervyn," said the priest calmly. "Death is the porter of Paradise. Who would prefer the aches and terrors of this life to death, if he felt as I do—that the shores of heaven bound the dark billows of the future? Would you have me give the lie to my whole existence? Where were now the religion of God, had Paul's heart failed for torture or for death? My resolution is fixed as the Alps. I am here to die for Him who died for all mankind."

"Come, come, Master Jesuit, we must have no more of your popish gabble," interrupted Oates. "Mr. Sheriff, there are precious though guilty souls around, and we must not suffer them to be corrupted, lest putting dry wood in the fire, it——"

"Villain!—nay, I am sorry to have spoken such a word at such a pass," said the priest, slightly kindling. "I would leave this earth without animosity against any man; but I bid thee remember!—these are thy high and palmy days in which thou flauntest with all thy branches at Heaven, saying to the winds, 'I am eternal!' But the lightnings of God will descend upon thee yet, wither thy pride, tear up thy roots, and make thy topmost verdure the hiding-place of snakes and reptiles!"

"Look ye, Master Sheriff, see you how the court springald eyes me?—the decoy-page!" said Oates, drawing back less from this outburst than from the fierce expression in Mervyn's countenance. "I doubt me, some paupish rescue is intended. Look to it, Master Bethel."

"Guards, draw near," exclaimed Cornish, in great alarm.

"Nay, nay, brother Cornish, I think they be only the squalid wretches of the prison about us, for the most

part in chains," said Bethel. "Let the prisoner say what he will—he can do them no harm. They cannot be damned deeper."

"But they may be saved," said Huysman, with a mild glance at the haggard masses. "Hear me, my brothers. I am come to die, and if ever men speak truth, it is at such a moment——"

"'Slife! gentlemen, do not hear the popish villain!" exclaimed Oates.

"No popery! no popery!" yelled the crowd, and a confused uproar followed, which was only silenced by the still louder voice of Cornish. "Silence, fellows, rogues, vagabonds! Let us do our duty," he shouted. "Come, Master Jesuit, we have no time to lose. The justices want to dine, and they cannot leave court till we bring word the prisoner will not plead."

"True, brother—his time of grace is over," said Bethel, hastily. "Come, sir, are you ready?"

"Be not so eager of blood, sirs, lest it be meted to you in your own measure," said Van Huysman, calmly. "I am ready; but first I would fain address a few words to these wanderers from the fold, and bid farewell to this child of my heart."

"Here it comes—a fine popish sarmon in Newgate," said Oates.

"Our warrant gives no authority for such scandalous pratings," said Cornish. "Speed, speed. Mr. Recorder Jeffries hath so endorsed it."

"Patience awhile, in the name of mercy!" exclaimed Mervyn, wildly. "Delay but an hour—one little hour—and in that time, I doubt not to obtain his Majesty's stay on these diabolical proceedings."

"Doubtless, doubtless," said Cornish, laughing sardonically. "What, does the young traitor accuse his Majesty of popish leanings?"

"My son," said the priest, tenderly; "my dear son, recollect yourself. The die is cast—the bitterness of death is over. What canst thou do? Be patient, child, and I will yet sow seeds which shall bloom in Paradise."

"I can do much, if I had but a gasp of time," said Mervyn. "I am in the King's service. Grant me but one hour, one half-hour, gentlemen, and I doubt not the

King shall take some order which shall spare the horror of this judicial murder."

"We have no right—no privilege—to disobey the orders of his Majesty's loard chaife justice," said Oates. "The sheriffs do so under an enormous forfeit to the King; and I know not that either of you, my masters, is so in the court sunshine as to escape any punishment it can inflict."

"For my part, I will do my duty, whatever comes of it, though it were against my natural blood," said the harsh fanatic Cornish.

"You hear, Mervyn," said the Jesuit, placidly. "Stand not between me and the glorious sun of bliss that never sets. In an hour—nay, weep not, child—in an hour this tortured spirit will rest for ever in the bosom of its God. It is a rough and steep ascent to heaven, but did our blessed Master tread a softer?"

"Come, dispatch, dispatch," exclaimed Cornish.

"You are eager, sir," said Van Huysman. "Look to it. The wheel of fortune is never at a stand, and its whirl may crush you too. You have a traitor's heart, and may find a traitor's doom."

"Father, if ever you have loved me, hear me," said Mervyn, passionately. "Plead to this tyrannous indictment. Your life, not your death, is needed by the Church. Consent to plead, and I will wring your pardon from the King, or die at his feet."

"It is too late, my fine young gallant, sentence is pronounced," said Oates. "He has rejected marcy, and my lords and judges—no, nor the King himself—cannot revoke the punishment."

"You lie, murderer, you lie! the King can pardon even at the block," shouted Mervyn. "He shall plead his Majesty's pardon—he shall, I swear it."

"No, my son, the King dares not pardon me," said Van Huysman. "The surges of faction run too high to save a single plank from the wreck. Besides, these gentlemen are in a hurry. How long, brother," he said, turning to the executioner, "how long does it take a man to die in the press?"

"Why, sir, that depends on the weight, and how it's put, and whether *the indulgence* is granted," replied Jack, scratching his bull-like head. "That same is a pointed piece of timber under the back, or pulling the sharp corner

of the press on the heart, and then it's done in about ten minutes or a quarter. But some have been known to live out a day. I never knowed one that needed anything the second, though."

"I cannot claim any such indulgence of messieurs the sheriffs, I am afraid," said Van Huysman, with a quaint, sad smile.

"No indulgence!" shouted Cornish. "Come, brother Bethel."

"I pray God, Master Cornish, that your last moments be not so hurried," said Van Huysman. Then turning calmly to the executioner, he said, "What is necessary to be done, brother?"

"Brother by Eve's side!—but that's the surer," replied the official, with a grin. "Why, sir, an't please you, you need only strip as naked as you were born."

"I trust you will allow me to die with decency, sirs," said the priest, with some emotion.

"Nay, 'tis enough if he strips to waistcoat and drawers," said Bethel, with a doubtful glance at his ferocious yoke-fellow. "Ay, ay, that will do, I think, Cornish?"

"Then I need only remove mine habit," said Van Huysman, unfastening a rope girdle which he wore. "I forgive mine enemies; but they made me wear this at the bar to excite a deadlier prejudice. Brother, I will not detain you long."

"I ain't in no hurry, sir," said Jack Ketch, politely. "But I hope you'll remember me. It's hard work, and I know a trick or two to make a gentleman's death come easy."

"I have always paid my debts, and am persuaded none ever deserved so much from my hands as thou wilt do to-day, friend," said Van Huysman, with a smile, and he put several pieces of gold in the executioner's hand.

"Why, sir, though I should say it that shouldn't," rejoined the man, greatly mollified with this present, "I always strives to do my duty to the satisfaction of all parties, and if their honours will let me, I'll put the bolt right over your fifth rib. I warrant you won't be long a-kicking."

He then, with officious zeal, aided the priest to strip off his mantle, which, after examining with the cautious eye of a Jew clothesman, he folded up as his perquisite.

Mervyn stood petrified with horror beside his doomed patron; even the mob were breathless with expectation, and curiosity painted itself in fearful characters on those wan, diseased, melancholy, or ferocious countenances, those haggard, gazing eyes, and gaping mouths.

Van Huysman proceeded to unbutton his vest, when he paused and turned to the mob, in a manner which irresistibly swayed them to attention.

"Brethren," he said, with awful solemnity of tone, "you see me here—I am here to die. In a few short minutes this living, breathing form, will be senseless clay. I trust you will hear me speak a few words, for few they shall be. If I have sinned——"

"Come, Mr. Housman, we cannot listen to this," interrupted Cornish.

"Well, I have done, sir," said Van Huysman, calmly. "The plougher's office is not the reaper's. I leave my forgiveness and blessing on all mankind—even on thee, Oates. And now I have done with life, except to bid thee farewell, my son—farewell, but *not* for ever." He turned to Mervyn, who sobbed convulsively. "Come hither, child," he said, in a moved tone, and, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, he added, "Thou art entered into a good service—of a king who is a Catholic at heart. Some day thy sword may be needed. I charge thee wear it ready in the sheath. I would fain confide to thee a secret, but this is neither the time nor the place. Know only that this locket contains the portrait of thy mother, a woman whose falsehood has embittered my whole existence. Bury it with me."

Van Huysman slipped a small gold locket into his hand, and then, with calm courage, removed his gaberdine and some other articles of his upper dress. When these were removed a shirt of horsehair appeared, and the marks of flagellation deeply set in the flesh. A murmur of surprise ran among all present. There was a finely carved crucifix of ebony tied to his breast, which he broke off and gave to Mervyn. He was now undressed to the state which Bethel's humanity had suggested.

"Are you ready, sir?" said the executioner.

"Let me bless thee for the last time and for ever," said the Jesuit, turning to Mervyn, who was sobbing bitterly, and he knelt while Van Huysman blessed him in the

solemn language of his Church. But as he proceeded, his voice grew broken, and, yielding apparently to an overpowering feeling, he raised the youth in his arms, and they mingled tears for some moments in silence. Even the ruffianly mob were affected, and many of the women burst into sobs and tears.

"Gock! what is this? Come, Master Cornish, let us have no more of this popish mummery," said Oates.

"No, no more," echoed Cornish.

"Come, good sir, we must not delay," said Bethel, in a mild and even sorrowful tone.

"True, true; I am ready," replied the Jesuit. He then kissed Mervyn's forehead, and gently unlocked his embrace.

"But I doubt if you are, my master," said Oates.

"The law says he shall be laid on his back with body bare——"

"Nay, come, Mr. Oates, we will not strain a point that way," said Bethel; "you are ready, sir?"

"Yea, for all things my Master ordains," replied the priest. "My son, withdraw; your grief is my only vulnerable point," added he, tenderly. "Sirs, I am ready."

"Come along, then; I am sure I am tired of waiting," said Oates.

The fatal procession then began its march.

CHAPTER XL

WHITEHALL AND NEWGATE

"This way, this way, sir!" said the executioner, unbarring a door which revealed a flight of steps leading to the dungeon where the press was kept. There was a general murmur of curiosity and horror. The sheriffs, each carrying a link, entered first, the prisoner followed, and then Mervyn, who would not leave him.

The prisoner seemed to give one last and somewhat lingering look on the light that was leaving his eyes for ever, and then walked into the dungeon.

For some moments the eye could discern no object, so

deep was the gloom, for daylight never entered this choicest haunt of horror. The sheriffs, however, raised their torches, and the awful scene became visible. It was a cell apparently about twenty feet square, with bare stone walls dripping with the sweat of ages. In the centre of the brick floor stood the tremendous engine of judicial barbarity. It was of a very simple apparatus, consisting merely of a rough-hewn tree, four huge rings and ropes to stretch the limbs on, and pulleys to raise the enormous mass of iron destined by the law to force the truth out of its victims. Mervyn gazed at these direful preparations in a state of dreamy horror, and perceived a lean gaunt figure crouching at a charcoal brazier, whose small twinkling eyes were fixed on him.

"What villanous fellow have we here?" said Cornish, interrupting Van Huysman, who had now knelt, and was praying aloud in Latin.

"You call him well. 'Tis Elkanah, the Jewish dog of a poisoner," said Bethel.

"What business has he here?" continued the surly sheriff.

"Only curiosity, I suppose," said Oates. "He is in pursuit of the elixir of life, and likes to see people die; 'tis a study."

"Only curiosity, curiosity, my lord!" said the Jew, clasping his hand with intense eagerness, as if afraid of being debarred from the satisfaction he anticipated.

"The elixir of life?" said Bethel. "Is the man mad? An it were the great art of alchemy, now, there were some reason in it. Hast any skill in that, Jew?"

"Something, a little. Oh, if I could but live six months longer it should be seen!" said the Jew, with a cunning rat-like glance at the miserly sheriff.

"Good sooth, he must be hanged next sessions for a rare gift in hastening a man's inheritance," said Oates, with a laugh. "But, in truth, the man hath a wondrous science in alchemy, Master Bethel. It were worth while to pack a jury, and save him for your own use."

"Fie, fie, doctor!" said Bethel, but somewhat thoughtfully.

Van Huysman had now concluded his prayer, and arose perfectly tranquil. "I have one word more to say, my son," he said. "I am bound not to reveal your real

parentage, but I swear to you, Blood is not your father. Padre Oliva alone has the power to tell you all."

He then resigned himself quietly to the executioner. By his directions he lay down on the timber, and the executioner stretched his arms as far as possible, fastening them securely to the rings. The same operation was tried on his feet, but his limbs were too long, and it was found necessary to tie them above the ankle.

"Courage, Mervyn!" said the victim, when all was prepared; "comfort me with the cross and pray for me. Good brother, let not the weight fall till I pronounce the name of the Saviour thrice."

He then seemed to pray again, for his lips moved audibly. But Mervyn's anguish had now regained the agony of consciousness. He threw himself in supplication at the feet of Bethel, imploring him for one hour—but one hour! The sheriff was inexorable, though he wept. The idea of the thousand marks forfeit to the King overpowered every other consideration.

"Are you ready now, sir?" said the executioner.

"Yes, I am ready," replied Van Huysman, steadily. "Forget me not, my son! *In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in eternum!* Pray for me, Mervyn! for ever, on earth, farewell!"

He then paused for a moment as if collecting all his strength, and closing his eyes with a slight convulsive shiver, pronounced that best of names, invoking which so much evil has been wrought in the world. "Jesu—Jesu—Jesu!"

The machinery was instantly in motion, and an enormous mass of iron appeared slowly descending on the breast of the victim. Mervyn made a frantic effort to rush forward, but Cornish caught him in his sinewy clutch.

There was a deep deathly silence. A thrill of horror ran through all present, and Bethel sobbed, but not a muscle of the condemned stirred. He opened his eyes, indeed, and fixed them steadily on the deadly machine as it wavered and descended slowly down. His face, however, flushed once almost crimson, and then grew white as stone.

"Wretches! I command you, in the King's name, forbear!" groaned Mervyn, desperately.

"Bring us a warrant, then!" exclaimed Bethel. "Away

to Whitehall, if you have the power you boast ; my horse is at the gate."

"Father, I go ! I will save you ! " he shouted, handing the cross to Bethel. "Good, charitable man, only delay the execution for ten minutes ! "

"I will, I will ! " said Bethel. "Cornish, this is too horrible ! "

Van Huysman raised his eyes mournfully, but Mervyn had disappeared with the rapidity of lightning. He rushed with frantic speed to the debtors' gate, where he found Bethel's horse, a wretched hack, waiting under charge of a ragged boy, to whose great surprise he instantly leaped into the saddle, and galloped off at a rate which soon left the urchin's shouts out of hearing. He rode as if the salvation of the whole human race had depended on his speed, heeding not the crowded state of the thoroughfares through which he passed like a phantom rider. People stopped to gaze after and wonder at his speed, but he noted no cry, no angry expostulation, and his horse, conscious of a wild rider, rushed, rather than galloped, till man and steed arrived breathless at Whitehall.

He threw himself from the foaming animal, learned that the King was in the great gallery of the palace, and that Chiffinch was in attendance. He found the old page in the ante-chamber of the gallery, with a music-master, from whom he was learning the viol.

"Chiffinch, I must see the King," he exclaimed, wildly.

"Must you, indeed ? It will be against his Majesty's express commands, then," replied Chiffinch, resuming his instrument rather scornfully. "He is playing at tables with Madame Gwyn."

"My business is of life and death ! " exclaimed Mervyn, and, struck with his tone, the page again looked up.

"What ails the youth ? " exclaimed he, letting his viol fall.

"A moment may be life or death, dear Chiffinch," said Mervyn, wildly. "I will explain it all after."

"Pass on, then ; I'll not hinder you," said Chiffinch. And in a moment Mervyn darted into the gallery, and threw himself at the King's feet, as he sat playing at chess with Nell Gwyn ; and at a propitious instant, for the King and his buxom partner were laughing till the tears came in their eyes, at some jest of Buckingham's. This

sudden apparition, however, checked the tide of the royal mirth.

"Od's bodkins! what have we here?" exclaimed Charles. "What, man, turned beggar already?"

"Yes, sire, a beggar for a life!" replied Mervyn, wildly. "Your merciless judges have revived a dead law to slay a man who has been my more than father. Van Huysman will not plead, and they are going to press him to death."

"Heyday! what is it, child?" said Mistress Gywn. "The Jesuit provincial—oh! that is my Lady Portsmouth's business. I am the Protestant—I know what."

And Nell and the King burst into a loud laugh.

"Sire, in the name of justice, of mercy!"

"Pooh, man, they have no influence at court. Had you asked in the name of faction, now—in short, I dare not save the man."

"But he is innocent, sire—I swear it—innocent!"

"I believe him so—Nell, it is your move—as I do all the victims of this accursed plot," said Charles, hastily. "He had better be guilty on the other side. The tide runs too furiously for a strain of the prerogative. The Jesuit must die, but I may avenge him some day. Nell, I have you now."

"And as long as your Majesty pleases to keep me, if my lord treasurer can afford it," said Nell, with a sly glance at Shaftesbury, who was standing behind the King.

"My liege, you do reject my prayer, then? for delay is equal to rejection," said Mervyn, vehemently.

"The obstinate old fool! I sent him word last night to plead, but he must play the martyr to an unbelieving generation," said Charles. "Well, what say you, my Lord Shaftesbury; is the old man to be squeezed to death?"

"Oh, no, no," exclaimed Nell. "One good turn deserves another, and it minds me now thou art the very youth who stood so bravely for me in—well, well; but, sure, you can easily save the old Jesuit, without offending the veriest scavenger of the mob."

"As how, madam?" said Shaftesbury, gravely. "I desire not the old fanatic's blood, but——"

"Feign that the wiseacres of the council have discovered matters on which to interrogate the prisoner," interrupted Nell, with a woman's quick wit. "Come, dear King!

write me an order on those pestilent sheriffs to surrender the body at your warrant—and send a guard with it."

"Well, we will try—pen and ink here," said Charles. "But which of my new council will sign it?—Poor Danby!"

"My lord of Monmouth will, on my life," said Mrs. Gwyn. "Elbow him not, Shaftesbury; I know he will!"

"If his Majesty deigns to allow me," said the duke, submissively.

In three minutes Mervyn was on horseback again, dashing wildly up Newgate Street. He saw confusedly that a crowd had gathered round a ragged boy who was whimpering and sobbing at the debtors' door. The moment he appeared, the boy darted out, yelling, "Here he is—here he is! Thieves, thieves!"

"Slaves! unhand me—I am a King's messenger!" shouted Mervyn, urging the exhausted animal with a violent plunge to the gate, where it fell vanquished by fatigue. He thundered at the iron door, which was opened instantly, rushed past the jailer, shouting, "A reprieve, a reprieve!" and ran with incredible speed through the press-yard, which was still crowded with felons.

Mervyn ran down the stairs leading to the press-room, and his hair seemed to stiffen on his head when, after a moment's dreadful pause, he distinguished no sound, no murmur even of voices! A deadly stillness seemed to reign; but the suspense of that moment seemed more dreadful than any certainty could be. He sprang forward. Profound as was the silence, all were there whom he had left, and by the dim glare of the torches he saw that the Jewish doctor was hanging over something, he dared not look to see what, as if gloating with horrible curiosity.

"How fast you have been, but it is too late," said Bethel, starting up as the youth thrust the reprieve into his hand.

"Monstrous traitor! did you not promise me——"

"Only to get you out of the way; it was better for you," replied Bethel, shuddering. "Look, he is almost gone."

He pointed as he spoke to the press, and Mervyn's eye dilated with horror as he followed the direction of the man's hand. Van Huysman lay there under an enormous weight of iron, his face swollen and purple, the blood streaming from his eyes, nose, and ears, seemingly insensible,

but convulsions of such power as to shake even the enormous mass on his chest ran over his gaunt limbs.

"Monsters, help in the King's name!" shrieked Mervyn, applying his strength to the vast bulk in a state of desperation which seemed to give a giant's energy to his exhausted powers.

"It is impossible; the rope is broken," said Oates, with a devilish smile, pointing to the pulley of the crane, which, in anticipation of some such scene, he had privately sawed in two.

"Release him, it is the King's order," groaned Bethel. "Heaven be praised! I took no part in it further than I was bound under penalty of a thousand marks."

The executioner, Bethel, and even Cornish, now added their strength to Mervyn's, and the mass yielded and rolled heavily off the victim's crushed breast. They raised him, but he was almost lifeless, and a dark stream of gore issued from his colourless lips.

"He is not dead," said the Jew, eagerly presenting himself. "Or—or let me apply the infallible criterion of Paracelsus." And, applying his mouth to that of the dying man, he drew a small bladder from his bosom, blew into it, and fastened it with strange avidity.

"Did you not see that, Master Bethel?" whispered Oates. "I have seen him do as much to several. That death exhalation is one of the ingredients of his grand experiments."

"He is going fast; there's nothing alive of him but the head," said Elkanah.

And as he spoke a strong convulsion shook every limb of the dying man, and he opened his eyes, but for several minutes their sense seemed gone, and he gazed glassily at Mervyn, who bathed his whole visage in tears. At last it seemed as if some degree of consciousness returned, and a faint smile played, or rather writhed, on his lips; and then, with a deep sigh, he sank quietly back in his pupil's arms, and the yellow effulgence of death passed over his face.

And thus departed one of the great spirits of the age, apparently on a petty point of little intrinsic worth or moment, and which yet condensed the warring principles of the times, the doctrine of spiritual exemption from civil power, and the attempt of the Catholic Church to retrieve her ancient supremacy.

CHAPTER XLI

A CAMPAIGN IN SCOTLAND

A FEW days after the tragical event we have just recorded, Mervyn landed at Edinburgh, alone and friendless in the world, at least as it appeared to him in his sorrow and desolation of heart. Before he left London he had fulfilled, as far as possible, the last instructions of his murdered patron. The sheriffs meant to have buried their mangled victim in the precincts of the prison, but Mervyn obtained an order from the King, and interred him in the churchyard of old St. Pancras, according to one of his dying requests, for there had the last mass been celebrated in England, while England was Catholic.

In the hurry and confusion of his thoughts on this occasion he forgot the locket, almost till the moment when the first shovel of earth fell with a hollow clatter on the coffin; and then recollecting it suddenly, he drew it from his breast, where it had remained from the moment he received it.

Hurried as he was by time and circumstances, Mervyn felt some little emotion of curiosity when he opened the golden case, for he now remembered that Van Huysman had told him it contained the portrait of his mother, as well as of his own unfortunate love. Great, however, was his surprise when, by the flickering light of the grave-diggers' torches, he recognised the features of the Lady Howard, but in the full pride of youth and beauty. Around the rim was a German inscription, of which Mervyn could only make out two names—Eleanor and Adrian. This, however, furnished no additional clue to the mysteries which surrounded him, and he suffered the locket to drop into Van Huysman's grave, with a thorough conviction that with it he buried the last clue to the labyrinth in which he was involved.

Mervyn arrived in Edinburgh at a moment when the various factions which distracted Scotland had rushed into a stormy conflict, which, like a tempest to a sea-gull, seemed to offer him the wild repose which troubled spirits find in strenuous action. The murder of Archbishop

Sharp; the seizure of Glasgow; and general revolt of the covenanters in the west; the uncertain state of the Highlands, which the banishment and outlawry of the Earl of Argyll had thrown into ferment; all these events rendered strong measures imperative, as it needed only a slight gleam of success to rouse the republicans of England to a similar attempt.

Our hero felt little reluctance to leave London, a city in which he had been a witness of so many atrocities, and where the perpetrators were in the full bloom of power and popularity. The Oatesian madness was at its height; arrests, executions, riots followed each other in rapid succession, and the turbulent city seemed only to rest when gazing at some of those dreadful spectacles which flattered its thirst of blood. Oates was looked upon as little less than a messenger direct from Heaven, with all the lustre of his celestial nature around him. Wherever he went, adoring crowds followed his steps; honours and wealth were heaped upon him, and in the general madness, the brutality of his manners, the profligacy, violence, ill-breeding, and insupportable arrogance of the wretch, were regarded as so many proofs of his divine mission, so many graces of the prophetic character. Numerous victims had bled on the scaffold, and many more awaited the same fate from frantic juries and judges, who dared not oppose the popular fury, lest it should sweep them too away.

One regret indeed Mervyn had, and one only—the light in which his character must appear to the noble Sydney and his lovely daughter. But as he felt the utter impossibility of clearing it of any part of the imputation so artfully heaped on him, and was too proud to expose himself to the chance of a mortifying rejection of his advances, he ventured only to thank the colonel for his goodness to him, in a letter which he wrote from Scotland. Whether Sydney received it or not he scarcely knew, but he obtained no reply nor acknowledgment. This, however, he did not wonder at, as his accusations against Sydney's party must have appeared to that pure and high-minded patriot merely a hireling's lies; but it added another bitter sting to those by which his enthusiastic nature was goaded on to a resolution which he took with solemnity on the day of his departure—either to redeem his name in men's opinions, or to perish honourably in the attempt.

And yet what a name! He found that his commission was directed to him as Cornet Mervyn *Blood*; but as he resolutely refused to acknowledge any other name but the first, he was known in the regiment principally by that.

Massey's dragoons, in which he found himself enrolled, was the disorganised remains of one of Cromwell's finest regiments, and scarcely mustered, on the whole, two hundred men. Of these, a part, to which Mervyn was attached, was shut up in Dumbarton Castle, and it was impossible to join them, the whole country being in possession of the rebels. He was rather glad of this, as it gave him a chance of being present at some general action, in which he might distinguish himself. But meanwhile he discovered, with surprise, the heterogeneous nature of the corps of which he had become a member. The soldiers were nearly all veterans—discontented men, who remembered the glories of Cromwell, and their own vast power under his rule, and who only longed for a good opportunity to restore that power, or at least attempt its restoration. The officers, on the contrary, were to a man royalist; fierce young cavaliers, who had learned nothing in a long exile but the most bitter hatred and contempt of their triumphant enemies. Accordingly, no good understanding existed between the men and their leaders. But this was the policy of the advisers of Charles, who had found it impossible to destroy the old republican army without, at the same time, casting it ready moulded into the hands of their antagonists, and therefore took this strange means of neutralising its tendencies.

Mervyn was exceedingly well received by his brother officers, for his renown as an anti-popish plotter, and *employé* of the court, had preceded him; it was, in fact, considered that he was a great favourite of the King himself, as well as of the York faction, and likely to be far advanced. Old Massey himself, the colonel, who substituted his own name for that of "Ireton's Lord-seekers," received him with distinguished kindness. He was an old cavalier of the out-and-out school, that would have died for the crown were it set on a bush, and had been in all the engagements of any consequence between Charles I. and the parliament, beside seeing a great variety of German service under the renowned Montecuculi. He was sixty years old, but still a fine weather-beaten veteran, as active as the youngest man in the regiment, and full of all the old opinions, prejudices, and

animosities of the civil war. But withal he was a gentleman and a man of refined honour, jealous of its least shade and form ; a strict disciplinarian, and a jolly companion ; and Mervyn's manners and ideas were much improved and enlarged by a constant intercourse with a man who was esteemed one of the best courtiers and soldiers of his time.

The dragoons, indeed, looked on their new officer with no very favourable eyes, regarding him as a traitor and a spy on the good cause ; but his general urbanity and kindliness of manner, and his subsequent displays of chivalrous courage, gradually melted their prejudices ; for the English soldier pardons everything to valour and generosity.

The preparations for marching against the rebels were meanwhile fast going on. The Duke of Monmouth arrived, and all things assumed a new aspect, which denoted the presence of an active and talented master. The lowland militia which formed the body, and the few regular troops which formed the strength of his army, were already concentrated round Edinburgh, and only waited for instructions to march.

The affairs of Scotland were at that time in a state of extreme and almost irremediable confusion. Distracted by religious and political parties of almost every shade and denomination, the oppressive administration of Lauderdale had for a moment united all in a desperate and open resistance to his tyranny. The gentry whose estates he had confiscated, joined the people whose religion he sought to extirpate, though but few appeared in the ranks of the rebellion. The murder of Sharp threw down a bloody gauge of battle, and suddenly roused the smouldering sparks into a wide blaze of insurrection. The storming of Glasgow followed, and an undisciplined army of covenanters, kept together by enthusiasm and the inability of the government to oppose any adequate force, now kept the field, and threatened Edinburgh itself.

Almost the first news which greeted Monmouth on his arrival was the defeat of the famous Claverhouse by a party of the rebels. His first desire and intention had been to conciliate these tumultuous victors, and to attract their affection to his own person, with a view to ulterior uses ; but this last outrage compelled him into immediate action. The preparations were hastily concluded, and the little army,

not much better disciplined or provided than that which they were to subdue, marched out of Edinburgh.

Mervyn's heart throbbed high when he found himself fairly on the road to glory or death. He was determined it should be one or the other, and in the desperation of his feelings he scarcely cared which. The splendour of war, its "pomp and circumstance," even on this small scale, made his heart bound with military enthusiasm, and the high warlike blood of his ancient race, though he knew it not, rushed with wild delight through his veins, like a young warsteed's at the trumpet-blast.

Vast crowds witnessed the departure of the little army, and every point of vantage of the ancient rock-built city was crowned with eager spectators, who greeted them with loud hurrahs and fervent prayers for their safe return. And as Mervyn joined the splendid suite of officers, who thronged to pay their respects to the Duke of Monmouth, and saw how coldly his leader's eye dwelt upon him, he inwardly determined that he would extort admiration and applause even from him, or win himself a place where the smiles of kings and generals are as ineffectual as their frowns.

Edinburgh and its tower-crowned rocks were speedily left behind, and the army defiled into the plains of West Lothian. The march was, of course, directed on Glasgow, in which city the rebels had strengthened themselves, but such was their confidence and rashness, that it was expected they would march out and meet the royal army on a stricken field. This opinion was confirmed by the scouts, and the army therefore advanced cautiously, and entering Lanark, arrived within sight of the enemy on the 22nd of June.

The covenanters occupied a strong position covering the road to Glasgow, protected by the waters of the Clyde, and the Bridge of Bothwell, which they had barricaded. The duke's army halted on the opposite bank, and a council of war was immediately summoned, to hear his instructions read, which had been hitherto sealed even from his own knowledge, at the instigation of the York faction. These were soon found to be positive, and not to be eluded, directing him not to treat with the rebels so long as they had arms in their hands ; and a battle was, therefore, at once determined on. Some overtures from the covenanters were rejected by Monmouth, though with mildness, and the only conditions were declared to be immediate

surrender. The covenanters were thus cut off from all hopes of treaty. Preparations commenced on both sides for an obstinate encounter, and Massey's dragoons were ordered to the front, almost facing the bridge.

It was now midday, and the sun, though surrounded by thick dark clouds, shone in a long slanting torrent of light on the covenanters' position, which extended along the stream, having Bothwell Briggs for its centre. They had fortified a stone sheep-cote, in the manner of a redoubt, on the opposite side of the bridge, and the rapidity of the waters, and the strength of the barricades of trees and carts, seemed to make it a matter of great difficulty to force their position. In the distance, Mervyn discerned the towers and steeples of Glasgow, and nearer at hand, the massive old castle of Bothwell, embosomed in its forests and morasses.

The appearance of the warriors who were to defend this position was curiously miscellaneous. Mervyn perceived no signs of military order and regularity. One large group seemed collected round a preacher who was holding forth on the top of a barrel; others seemed busy at their private devotions; but the greater part were engaged in cooking, and in cleaning old matchlocks.

The royal banner was now displayed, and Monmouth appeared on horseback, with a brilliant staff, and rode along the lines, exhorting the men to courage and order. Half an hour's grace had been allowed to the covenanters to send in their submission, and an hour had elapsed, and as the duke arrived before Massey's position, Grahame of Claverhouse galloped up to tell him so.

"Let us do nothing in a hurry, sir," replied the duke, reining in his horse. "Send a trumpeter to inquire their final determination, and then we will act."

"I will go, my lord, an it please you," said Mervyn, eagerly.

"Go, then, sir," replied the duke, in a cold and almost contemptuous manner.

Mervyn dashed his spurs into his steed, and in a moment was on the bridge, waving his hand in token of parley. But a rattle of musketry warned him to retire, and he galloped back to the duke, with a flushed cheek and sparkling eye which seemed for a moment to excite his attention.

"So, sir, we have witnessed your success," he said, with a sneer, and as he spoke, a shower of balls rattled among the leaves of an oak under which he stood; but the duke moved not a muscle, and his well-trained war-horse merely pricked its ears. Mervyn smilingly lifted his hat, which was perforated with a ball, and looking earnestly at the enemy, exclaimed, "If your Grace will give me leave to treat with them in another manner, I doubt not to bring you better tidings."

"Clear me the bridge, then, Massey," said the duke, reluctantly, at last. "Grahame will back you."

"I will back no man, my lord, where I can be the first," replied the fiery chief, with a dark flush; but Massey seemed to be of a similar opinion, and spurring his horse, with a loud hurrah, which was echoed by his officers, and not by the men, he galloped recklessly forward, followed by the troop. In a moment they were on the bridge, and Mervyn was abreast with his fiery old colonel. But a serious and determined resistance awaited them. Clouds of musketry enveloped everything, and a sharp hand-to-hand combat took place around the barricades, which were densely crowded with pikemen and musketeers.

Suddenly Mervyn saw that Massey's horse was struck with a ball on the head, and, maddened with pain and terror, the animal reared and plunged with such violence, that it was with difficulty the colonel kept his seat. Meanwhile, a powerful covenanter was pressing furiously upon him. Mervyn spurred his horse between, and engaged with the antagonist, but he had the horror to witness at the same moment that the colonel's desperate charger leaped the parapet of the bridge into the river.

He had no time to render any assistance. A new rush of combatants swept him away from his antagonist, and he found that the dragoons were giving way on every side. At this moment he felt that the crisis of his fate had arrived, and, reckless of life or death, he rushed into the midst of the covenanters, shouting, "England for ever! Iretons, remember *Dunbar*!"

It seemed as if these words contained some magic spell of old recollections. The dragoons returned with fury to the charge, and, after a momentary conflict, carried the bridge with an impetuosity which nothing could withstand. The whole field was flooded with a general rout, and the

covenanters fled in every direction, a confused and yelling mob, in spite of the valiant efforts of a few of their leaders.

By this time the duke's whole army, with himself at the head, had crossed the bridge, but every vestige of resistance had disappeared. Mervyn was first in the pursuit as well as in the charge, and it was not until he had ridden nearly a mile beyond the bridge, capturing at pleasure and hewing down those who persisted in flight, that he felt he was himself wounded. He grew suddenly sick and faint, and felt an acute pain in his left arm, which, on examination, he found severely wounded with a claymore. His horse, too, was exhausted, and he thought it best to return and have his wound bound, for the blood was welling fast from it. He saw a party of horsemen collected about the bridge-head, and thither he directed his way.

On arriving he found it was the Duke of Monmouth and several officers, looking at what, to Mervyn's great sorrow, he recognised as the body of Colonel Massey, lying half in the stream and the other half crushed beneath the dead carcase of his horse, on the margin where they had fallen. He advanced, and respectfully congratulated the duke on his victory. It was some moments before the duke appeared to recognise him, so covered was he with blood and dust, but Claverhouse exclaiming that it was the victor of the day, the duke held out his hand and shook Mervyn's very heartily.

"You have proved yourself a most gallant soldier, sir," he said, with a smile of singular sweetness; "and since we have lost your brave commander, I know not how we can better fill his place than by appointing you to command the troops you have so bravely led with the rank of captain —at least, as far as our power extends," he added, with a cloud on his brow, "for they have confined and crippled me in every direction."

Mervyn bowed his acknowledgments, for his heart gushed too full to speak. It was then, for the first time, that Monmouth perceived he was wounded, or that Mervyn recollected it himself. The duke ordered him to retire to his own tent, and directed his surgeons to attend him. Monmouth was a man of sudden impulses, but not deficient in political sagacity, and he perceived that while this appointment was likely to be approved at court, it would

conciliate to his cause a daring and adventurous spirit, which he had many other reasons to dread.

Mervyn's wound was not deep, and in a few weeks he was ready to take his new command of poor Massey's dragoons. The duke graciously confirmed his former gift, mentioned him with distinguished encomiums in his despatches, and though he had not yet received any mandates from London, appointed Mervyn to the command of Dumbarton Castle, then the centre of one of the most disturbed districts.

The defeat at Bothwell Briggs crushed the strength of the covenanters, but not their resistance. The flames of rebellion were rather scattered than extinguished, but the royal army marched on without resistance to Glasgow. Thence Monmouth distributed a few garrisons in various directions, and returned in great triumph to Edinburgh.

Thrown thus on his own resources, in the midst of a wild country and a turbulent population, Mervyn's character began to display its nobler qualities, and to acquire the strength and decision of maturer years. Perched in the rocky castle of Dumbarton, overlooking a wide plain bordered by the almost savage Highlands of Argyleshire, which at that time were almost unknown to the English, he watched the motions of an enemy of unconquerable zeal and obstinacy. The least spark falling among the scattered embers might rekindle the flames of war, and Mervyn had to trample them out as fast as they appeared; and he executed his task with an energy and humanity which excited the admiration even of his enemies.

Many months passed in this fatiguing employment, and he continued to receive the duke's approbation, but no confirmation of his appointment. Monmouth accounted for this by asserting that the Duke of York, considering him as having deserted to his nephew's faction, refused to sanction it, but at the same time dared not openly disapprove or annul it.

News from the centre of the political struggle, London, reached the remote garrison of Dumbarton but seldom, and then it was not of the most cheerful nature to the duke's faction. The fury of the plot was beginning to subside, the populace were glutted with blood, and showed some weariness of their unholy food. The cloud of witnesses which appeared, encouraged by Oates's success, being all

men of infamous character and manners, rather diminished than strengthened the credibility of his revelations. The continued absence of all tangible proofs, all outward substance to the dreadful shadow he had raised, excited general suspicions as to its existence at all; but sixteen victims had perished by a shameful and terrible death ere the acquittal of Sir George Wakeman gave the first great blow to the plot. The blood of the aged Stafford was still indeed to be poured on the scaffold for an imaginary crime; but that execution closed the line of judicial murders, and the revulsion which popular opinion now sustained began to act upon the authors and abettors of the diabolical statecraft. This odium fell in some measure upon the innocent members of the popular party also, and prepared the way for the severe retaliation which Charles afterwards inflicted.

The Duke of Buckingham had meanwhile abandoned the court, and gone over to the Whigs, with his usual versatility, and was now one of its bitterest enemies, stimulated no doubt by some private pique, much more than by the patriotism he affected. Mervyn would have taken little note of this circumstance, but for its connection with that man who called himself his father. Blood had for some time enjoyed the post of regular court-bully, and, doubtless, to gratify the hatred of the court against the apostate duke, he had suborned some ruffians to accuse him of a crime, of which he was not perhaps innocent. But the duke turned the tables with the weight of his purse, and the informers confessed their subornation. Blood was immediately held to bail, and a *premunire* issued against him. Then he was tried, found guilty, and visited with all the punishments of *scandalum magnatum*; he was amerced in a fine of ten thousand pounds, and took refuge from this enormous penalty in the bounds of the King's Bench.

Mervyn was not much affected with the misfortunes of his worthy father, and he was, besides, almost absorbed in the difficulties and dangers of his own position. Rumours were rife that the court had so far recovered from its panic as to project a dismissal of the Shaftesbury ministry, and the recall of the Duke of Monmouth. The prospect of Lauderdale's return again excited commotions and petty insurrections, which, though not dangerous, were harassing, and a dark cloud of war seemed gathering in the Western Highlands, where the numerous and powerful clan of

Argyle bore with impatience the continued banishment of their chief.

In this state of things, Mervyn received, with extreme surprise, an order from Monmouth and his council, to march to Inverary, the great stronghold of the Campbells, situated in the heart of their wild fastnesses, there to arrest the earl, who, it was stated, had returned among his people, in defiance of the government and law.

Mervyn had good reasons for the very great surprise with which he received this command. In the first place, the object could be easily frustrated by the earl's departure, or by secreting himself among his devoted clansmen. In the next place, it was almost impossible to be accomplished. To penetrate into those wild fastnesses, through passes which could be defended against a powerful army by a few resolute men, and, with the slender forces which he could muster, to overcome the numerous and valiant clan of Argyle, seemed a Quixotism to attempt. A larger force would, on the other hand, run great risk of starvation ; for the Highlanders were rich only in cattle, and a few skirmishers could cut off the supplies of a whole host. But supposing that these important matters were put to the venture, another danger occurred—that the covenanters would rise in his absence, and wrest Dumbarton from the slender force which he could leave behind to protect it.

Imperative as his orders were, Mervyn ventured, on these considerations, to delay obedience, and wrote his objections to the council. He was answered in an exceedingly flattering but resolute tone, by the duke himself. He assured him that he was forced to the measure by the outcries of the Lauderdale faction, who accused him of winking at the earl's residence in the Highlands. In the next place, there was no danger of resistance on the part of the Campbells : the Countess of Argyle, who ruled them in her husband's absence, had declared her innocence, and offered to submit to any investigation of the King's officers. To obviate the apprehension of the covenanters, the duke authorised him to raise the militia of Glasgow, and leave his castle in the custody of their captain. He further piqued his pride by representing that the great Montrose had invaded and conquered Argyle with a force almost as inadequate as his own, and in the depth of winter, whereas it was now the

close of a fine summer. Finally, he left him no resource but to march or throw up his commission.

Mervyn felt that something ulterior was meant under this fair outside show, which he could not yet fathom ; for the man appointed to hold Dumbarton during his absence was notoriously a favourer of the covenant. But as his instructions were so positive, he had no resource but a reluctant obedience.

CHAPTER XLII

A WARLIKE EXCURSION IN THE HIGHLANDS

Mervyn commenced his march early on a very cloudy morning, which seemed to presage no lucky issue to his enterprise. He left Dumbarton, however, in safe hands, preferring to miss the services of some forty of his best men, to leaving his basis of operation, and sole point of retreat, at the mercy of chance. His little army consisted of about two hundred men, of whom about half were regular soldiers, and the rest picked men of the Lowland militia. Very doubtful, however, of his reception, he determined to march by an unusual way, and to cross the mountains at Tarbet by a route, if route it could be called, known only to shepherds and deer-hunters, and deemed impassable. But relying on the statements which many of the latter class united in making, that it is quite possible in the summer-time to overcome the obstacles offered by nature unless aided by men, he resolved on one of the most extraordinary marches which had been made in those parts since the wildly chivalrous exploits of Montrose.

It was not without some emotions of awe and curiosity that Mervyn approached that lofty chain of dark hills which hid as it were a new world, where the opinions and manners of a barbarous departed age were still in full vigour. His guides were two old deer-hunters, familiar with every pass and defile, and as he was obliged to confide himself wholly to their bribed faith, it was not without much secret alarm that he found himself and his little army plunging deeper and deeper into those tremendous mountain soli-

tudes. Valley after valley, narrow and deep, and hemmed in by dark hills of coarse heath, and crowned by bare pinnacles of rock; torrents rushing madly down those fathomless glens; rugged hills sloping down to the shining breasts of salty inland lakes; sweet glimpses of green and fertile lowlands reposing like nymphs in the arms of satyrs; endless successions of rank gorse, marsh, and hill upon hill of short strong grass, which seemed piled like stairs to heaven; all passed in grand panorama before the young leader's awe-struck gaze. They encountered no living being but a few shepherds, who fled at their approach, numerous flocks of sheep and herds of deer. Mervyn, however, allowed his soldiers to touch nothing on the march but the provisions they had brought with them, except a few head of deer, which, as a wild game, he considered lawful spoil.

The eagle screaming in his rocky abysses, the roar of torrents, the strange lights gleaming and wandering among the mountains, now all aglow with purple and crimson heather, then dark and dun as sorrow, filled the young soldier's mind with ideas of sublimity and grandeur, which seemed to satisfy a want in his poetical and somewhat dreamy nature. The excitement, too, of enterprise, and the consciousness of a proud responsibility, were gratifying to a mind without much actual experience, and full of the chivalric legends of Ariosto.

The first day's march was quite unmolested, and at night they bivouacked under a lovely autumn moon, on the summit of one of those vast green braes on which the Highland shepherd rears his chief wealth. Mervyn knew that the flying herdsmen would have spread the news of his march in a few hours, and he was anxious to allow as little time as possible to prepare assistance. His drums beat with the first peep of light, and towards noonday his little army came to the last ridge of those wild sierras which sweep downward to the glittering waters of Loch Fyne. On the opposite shores of the loch, backed by another dark pile of mountains, the towers of Inverary arose in desolate grandeur.

Hitherto they had met with no opposition, in fact, had seen scarcely a living being, and Mervyn began to fear something ominous in this continued disappearance of the numerous clan inhabiting the regions he had now entered.

But he had no resource but perseverance, and he continued his march around the rocky basin of the loch, passing through defiles which, by their natural difficulties alone, might have effectually barred all entry to an invader. But these terrible passes were quite undefended, the cottages on their march deserted, and not a sign of habitation to be met with. As he approached Inverary, however, the range of black hills on his right sometimes poured forth a sudden cloud of Highlanders, who seemed to watch their movements, but without any hostile demonstration of their own intentions.

Mervyn and his little army halted within a few miles of Inverary, in a position of great strength, for it was defended by a morass on one hand, and a deep glen on the other, where he resolved to ascertain the real disposition of his opponents. Accordingly, he sent out scouts, and one of his sergeants with a flag to Inverary, stating that he desired an interview with the Countess of Argyle, or any of her deputies, to announce his Majesty's pleasure, which he had come to execute in that country.

This message produced an immediate effect. Three Highland gentlemen, evidently men of superior rank, returned with the sergeant. One of these, a tall, stately man, attired in the clan tartan, though of richer materials, and with a costly mantle of sables, fastened round his breast by silver wolf's paws, seemed to be the chief personage, and he informed Mervyn that the Lady Argyle was in her castle of Inverary, and very much surprised to hear that the King had thought it necessary to have his pleasure announced in her country by a military force; that she desired only to know his Majesty's pleasure to obey it, and therefore requested Captain Mervyn to come to Inverary and announce it to her personally, and that meanwhile she sent her dear cousins, Sir Duncan Campbell of Inverlochy, and Ronald of Tarbet, as hostages for his safe return.

Mervyn consented readily to this plan, which he thought would obviate many inconveniences, and, accompanied by the Highland gentleman in sables, rode to Inverary, over a wild waste of moor and hill. It was sunset when they entered the castle, and Mervyn found that his companion was a man of apparent consequence, from the homage which was paid him by all whom they met. He was besides a man of very agreeable and fluent conversation, and

seemed well acquainted with the state of political events and persons.

They entered the castle by a hall of great extent, the walls of which were of blue granite, garnished with stags' heads, horns, and other sylvan trophies, arms of various ages and manufactures, shields, targets, pikes, claymores, steel-coats, and helmets. Two vast fires of pine logs burned at either end, in cavernous chimneys, and three oaken tables, extending the whole length of the hall, seemed prepared for a banquet. This apartment was filled with a great variety of persons, some sitting in conversation, but the greater part standing to receive the guests. They were nearly all fine muscular-looking men, in the Highland garb, many of them of quality ; but there was mingled with them a few persons whose coarse Lowland habits, long ascetic faces, and drawling tongues, announced them as covenanters.

It was with evident and very great astonishment that Mervyn recognised, in conversation with the countess, who sat at the upper end of the hall in great state, surrounded by her ladies, the faces of several persons familiar to him in London. The principal of these was the Lord Howard, Monmouth's great friend and abettor in all his projects. There was one Rumsey, a creature of Shaftesbury's, a man of very blandishing manners, with a sly, foxy expression of countenance, likely to put a physiognomist on his guard. There was another, an old companion of Colonel Blood, and one of Cromwell's boldest lieutenants, who afterwards figured in the Rye House conspiracy. It was Rumbold. He had a large burly head, and only one eye, the other being knocked out by a blow which disfigured the whole side of his face, and he was deeply pitted with the small-pox.

" You are welcome, sir—very welcome," said the countess, rising to receive her military guest. " Whatever your message be, the messenger is our guest, and, as such, deserves all honour."

" I thank you, madam," replied Mervyn, bowing deeply, and somewhat struck with the dark beauty of the lady's features, and with the melancholy tones of her voice. " But I am afraid my business here has little claim on your hospitality."

" Do not state it, then, till you have had some little

conversation with my Lord Howard, who is direct from the Duke of Monmouth," said the countess, hastily. "Meanwhile, we pray you to partake of such poor refreshment as our wild country can afford, and rest awhile from——"

"No, madam, I must needs decline your courtesy," interrupted Mervyn. "I am here at the King's orders to arrest the Earl of Argyle, if he be in these parts, and will not taste the salt of any man with such a purpose in my heart."

"Arrest Argyle in the midst of his clan!" echoed Mervyn's companion, with a grim laugh, which was repeated in a variety of tones by the brawny warriors around. "Prithee, sir, have you ten thousand men at your heels?"

"I have the King's authority, sir, backed with which I fear not to do my duty against any odds!" replied Mervyn, warmly.

"Well, Captain Mervyn, but first hear what we have to say," said Howard, taking his arm in a mysterious manner. "My lady countess will pardon us awhile." And he led the young leader apart, into a dark octagonal recess, formed in a tower which overlooked the lake.

"Come, my dear Mervyn, let us drop this farce," he said, with a smile. "Here is the duke's letter; read it, and give us your opinion."

As he spoke, he handed a letter to Mervyn, sealed with Monmouth's arms, and in his own handwriting. The duke began by assuring him that he perceived the justice of all his reasoning on the expedition, and the total inadequacy of the forces at his command; and that so chimerical an idea as that of arresting Argyle in his own country had never occurred to him as a possibility; it was, in fact, with a very different intention that he had directed Mervyn to march: this was no less than to join his troops, already well disposed that way, to the clansmen of Argyle, make a sudden descent on Glasgow, and proclaim the Covenant, and the redress of divers political grievances. The whole west of Scotland, he said, was ready to burst out in a flame of insurrection, which would soon spread to England; and Shaftesbury, and other nobles of his powerful party, had promised to take the seizure of Glasgow as a signal for a revolt in London. Thus the government would be distracted, and not know which way to turn, and, meanwhile, Monmouth would march against Glasgow with an army

devoted to him, which, on approaching, should fraternise with the insurgents, and proclaim him general of the Scots and English armies for the redress of grievances. Dumbarton, according to the duke, was left in the hands of a partisan of the commonwealth, so that no resistance need be apprehended there. To concert this grand rebellion it seemed that Howard represented the duke; Rumsey, Shaftesbury and his party; and Rumbold, the desperate republicans of Cromwell's time, ready to dare and do anything. Many clans in alliance with Argyle, and favourers of the covenant had promised their adherence, and on the whole it seemed, indeed, a plot of a most alarming and extensive nature. Vast rewards were promised to Mervyn for his adherence and services to the cause, and divers hints thrown out that it was the last offer of an exalted destiny which fortune was likely to make him. On the other hand, it was pretty plainly intimated that he had not much freedom of choice, as he and his troops were at the mercy of Argyle and his clan.

"Well, and what says the gallant Sidier Roy?" exclaimed Mervyn's Highland companion, impatiently stepping into the recess.

"He says that he is not a traitor, and that this is treason—black, unholy treason!" exclaimed Mervyn, tearing the letter into a thousand pieces.

"Are you mad?" said Howard, with extreme surprise. "Why, the duke told us you were all prepared to do as he pleased, and that you had been much injured by the court."

"In all lawful matters, I *am* prepared," replied Mervyn, "but not to betray my King and country, and my own honour! I will not believe that the Duke of Monmouth ever wrote this letter, and I am willing to put what interpretation you please on your presence here, but I have a duty to perform here, and that only—I demand from you all, in the King's Majesty's name, if he be refuged in these countries, the person of Archibald, Earl of Argyle, as a traitor and fugitive."

"He is here, then," replied the Highlander, with a fierce smile, and striking his brawny chest. "I am Maccuilmore, chief of the Campbells; and now what have you to say to me?"

"I arrest you in King Charles's name," replied Mervyn, resolutely, "and I command you to surrender yourself."

"Look here!" exclaimed the chieftain, with a hoarse laugh, and throwing open the window, he drew a pistol from his girdle and fired it over the loch. In a moment the opposite hills seemed covered with Highlanders, who ran down to the shores of the lake, and seemed assembling in masses below. "Look here, Captain Mervyn:—a thousand Campbells are there, all men of bone and sinews, who will suffer themselves to be hacked to pieces to the last man ere any Saxon shall lead their chieftain hence by force."

"You muster a strong power, but I trust not to resist the King's authority," replied Mervyn, gazing with an undismayed eye over the assembling host.

"The King is in the hands of arbitrary and popish counsellors," said Howard. "I marvel what great hopes you have in them, Master Mervyn, that you reject the only chance of grasping glory and fortune at once, which fate may ever put in your way?"

"What, Lord Howard! do you think that by any act of mine I will assist to place in power the butchers of Godfrey and Van Huysman?" said Mervyn, with strong emotion. "Besides, you are mistaken in all your calculations. The clans of the north detest you—England is unripe for a revolt—Dumbarton is safe in loyal hands—and, if need be, I will hack myself a way out of these mountains, or you shall slay the officer and soldiers of your King!"

In vain did the other plenipotentiaries in this extraordinary conference crowd around him, and press him with a great variety of arguments and entreaties. All the loyal and honourable feelings of his heart revolted from the treachery contemplated, and it seemed as if the time prophesied by Van Huysman had arrived, when the salvation of the Catholic Church in England seemed to hang on his breath, for its total destruction was no doubt one of the objects of the fierce sectaries who called themselves covenanters and political reformers of the time. Threats were tried with an equal want of success, and but for Lady Argyle's interference, violence in the heat of passion might have been resorted to, for the wilder guests outside began to take a part in the controversy. Argyle even dropped obscure hints that Mervyn's soldiers would not remain faithful to him, and fearful that something sinister was in agitation in his camp, he demanded to return thither. Howard and the chieftain both pressed him to take at

least the night to consider their proposition, and fearful that they would not let him go at all, he tacitly agreed, and was at last allowed to depart.

On returning to his camp and dismissing the hostages, he saw clearly enough that the soldiers expected some extraordinary revelation, and, from the knowledge he had of their principles, he feared they had been tampered with to some purpose in his absence. But to put in execution the resolution which he had formed in his own mind, he affected a very cheerful air, directed the soldiers to light large fires, accepted with great affability a present of provisions which arrived from Inverary, and, in presence of the messengers, made every preparation as if to spend the night on the ground which he occupied.

But such was far from being Mervyn's intention. Surrounded as he was by overwhelming numbers, and with a secret of such importance in his possession, he felt that the enemy could not intend to let him escape out of their clutches. At the same time he reflected on the chances that Dumbarton might be seized, and his retreat in that direction cut off.

The vital importance of an immediate resolution now struck him too strongly to allow of hesitation, for as night advanced all the hills and borders of the lake gleamed with fires, lit by the Highlanders in their bivouacs round the castle of their chief. He determined, therefore, on a measure which would have done credit to a general of the daring and rapid school of our own times. He suffered his soldiers to eat their supper, and even made preparations for the night's bivouac, but suddenly the order was issued to march, and, without allowing time for remonstrance or disobedience, the little army commenced its retreat in all possible silence, and under the propitious shadow of a very dark night. Mervyn directed the fires to be heaped, and himself brought up the rear, to prevent any straggling which might betray his intentions.

Calculating that the Highlanders, if they discovered his departure, would conclude he had taken the least difficult and dangerous way, he preferred returning by the road he had come, over their wildest and most desolate mountains. His Highland guides had now, however, deserted him, and he was obliged to trust to his own recollections and the conjectures of his officers, in the depth of night, crossing a

black and desolate range of fells and glens which offered no road, and scarcely a single point to which the memory could cling. Nevertheless, it was with great delight that he took a farewell glance of the illuminated loch and hills of Inverary, and plunged into the darkness of a deep valley skirted on both sides by lofty mountains.

Mervyn could not assure himself of success, however, until the morning broke on his fatigued and straggling little host, and no signs of pursuit appeared. Still he allowed them but a short rest before he was again *en route*, and tarrying neither for stragglers nor those that were worn out with fatigue, he arrived at length in safety at Tarbet.

Here bad news awaited him. Sergeant Hoskins, the man whom he had left in charge of Dumbarton, had sent a messenger to inform him that the covenanters were stirring in all parts, and that he hourly expected an attack, which, with his trifling numbers, would very likely prove successful.

Mervyn's men were too much exhausted to continue their march, however necessary their presence at Dumbarton, but ordering them to follow after a few hours' rest, he set off on horseback, with only a single trooper, and reached the castle in safety. The news of his sudden and almost marvellous return, and, perhaps, tidings from their friends in the mountains, seemed to strike panic into the turbulent population around ; all signs of resistance disappeared, and the murmurs of the rising tempest sunk into a dead calm.

Mervyn had now time to reflect on what he had done, and though he in nowise repented his conduct, he apprehended with justice that he had forfeited Monmouth's patronage, and, in fact, incurred his hatred and that of the powerful faction which backed him ; but the consciousness that he had done his duty, and the chivalric renown which he had acquired by the brilliant manner in which he had done it, somewhat consoled him. Gratitude for the kindness which the duke had shown him, and a faint hope of again conciliating his favour, made him resolve to know no more than what was generally understood by his troopers and the public, and he wrote to the council a detail of his expedition, wherein he omitted all the extraordinary proposals made to him at Inverary.

He received in reply a cold official statement, that the council approved of all he had done, but that they had learned from certain information that the Earl of Argyle

was still at the Hague, and had not left that city during the two years of his exile. The epistle concluded by stating that as his great services had rendered him peculiarly odious to the westland people, and as the country was so tranquillised as no longer to need them, he was to prepare for a successor, in the person of one Colonel Rumbold, and to take his departure for Edinburgh immediately on the arrival of that officer.

Mervyn felt that this was driving him into a corner, and in the first flush of anger he half resolved to report all he knew to the Yorkists in London, and keep his command in spite of the council at Edinburgh; but the imminent hazard of such a step, and the experience he had obtained of the unbounded injustice of both the factions, made him hesitate. Then although his soldiers both loved and reverenced him, they were not likely to back him in a quarrel against Monmouth and the principles which were still so dear to them; indeed, Mervyn was aware that intrigues were at work among them, which he had much difficulty in winking at. But his perplexities were now put to rest by an event which burst so suddenly on Scotland, that it took all parties and factions by surprise. The King dismissed his popular administration, recalled Monmouth, appointed the Duke of York in his room, deprived him of all his offices and places, and ordered him to retire to Holland or France.

A new world now began in Scotland, for no sooner was the duke installed in Holyrood House, than he commenced a wide and sweeping purification, as his courtiers called it, in which the partisans of Monmouth were most cruelly oppressed and maltreated. Mervyn had soon reason to conclude that he was regarded in the light of one of these, for he received an abrupt command to resign his governorship to an old cavalier officer, who arrived for that purpose, and to present himself at Edinburgh, to give his royal Highness an account of his late expedition into Argyleshire, which appeared to the council of a very suspicious nature and result.

Mervyn obeyed without remonstrance or hesitation; indeed, it was not without a considerable degree of satisfaction that he laid down an office which entailed so much inglorious bloodshed and harassing warfare on its possessor, more especially as his conscience acquitted him of all un-

necessary cruelty or tyranny in the exercise of his great and irresponsible power.

On reaching Edinburgh, Mervyn immediately announced his arrival to the council, and, considerably to his surprise, he received orders to attend the Duke of York in his private apartments at Holyrood, and following the messenger, he found himself shortly in the presence of the royal viceroy himself.

The Duke of York, like most of the Stuart family, was a man of noble stature and commanding features, with a somewhat gloomy character of expression. He was sitting alone, in a narrow ill-furnished chamber, poring over a heap of papers which lay before him. Mervyn was startled at the suddenness of his introduction, and coloured deeply, but he was still more astonished at the graciousness of his reception: the duke extended his hand, and smiled affably as the young soldier bent down in some confusion to kiss it.

"Well, sir, you look well after your extraordinary campaign," said the duke. "Think not we have disgraced you. We reserve you for something better than a scarecrow to keep a few rebellious peasants in awe. Besides, we are curious to hear the particulars of your Highland tour."

"It was entirely against mine own opinion and advice, please you, that I undertook it," said Mervyn, with some hesitation. "The particulars of my expedition I transmitted in a letter to the late council, a copy of which——"

"I have read *that*—it contains only half the truth, man," said the duke, hastily. "I am perfectly well acquainted with all that happened to you at Inverary, and the projected most dangerous rising which your heroic loyalty and chivalrous courage totally disconcerted. And let me add, that I expected no less from a pupil of that revered and sainted martyr, blessed Father Van Huysman, whose soul God keep!"

"But by what means did your royal highness——"

"No matter, sir!—a man who has the inheritance of three kingdoms at stake on the intrigues of a bold and crafty faction, must keep his eyes open. But I recognise in you a champion of my cause and that of Heaven and our religion, so severely menaced by these ferocious sectaries. The tidings of this conspiracy drove his Majesty to his late sudden measures; but it would have cost seas of blood to set matters to rights again had you acted in the smallest

particular otherwise than you have done. I am obliged, however, at present to content myself with the banishment of this insolent bastard, who pretends to my crown. And mark you the depth of policy in these dangerous men—they put you upon this enterprise because they knew if you proved refractory, your evidence, on account of your strange connection with the popish plot, would avail little with a factious jury. Do you think it was for any love of you? Read this paper; it was found in Monmouth's state cabinet, abandoned in the hurry of flight."

Mervyn mechanically took the offered paper, and read, with amazement and indignation, a letter from Shaftesbury to Monmouth, in which the former refused to confirm Mervyn's appointment to Dumbarton Castle, and advised the duke to pretend that it was owing to the opposition of the Yorkists; so that the injustice done to him might plunge the young soldier, heart and soul, into *the* cause.

The Duke of York remarked with satisfaction the indignation visible in Mervyn's expressive features; but he gave the letter back with a silent bow.

"You see, then, what manner of backers these traitors are," he said, quietly. "But now you shall perceive the difference between constituted and usurped authority. His Majesty will not permit any proceedings to be taken against these conspirators, as his son—or rather Lucy Waters's, for Heaven knows that is the safest side of his parentage—is so deeply concerned in it. But, in token of his admiration and appreciation of your conduct, he appoints you to the vacant captaincy of his gentlemen-at-arms, by which you will be very near his person; and this is but a step, Master Mervyn, on your way of fortune."

Mervyn was dazzled by this sudden lustre of his lucky stars, and thanked the duke with an energy and eloquence which seemed to please him highly.

"We must have you in Parliament, too," he said with a smile. "But, meanwhile, you will be highly useful to us near his Majesty's person; for I think, Captain Mervyn—I think," he said, with much emphasis, "I may calculate on one true friend, who will not desert me in my troubles, when they come."

Mervyn raised the cross of his sword, and kissed it with significant fervour; and the interview shortly afterwards terminated in the highest mutual satisfaction.

CHAPTER XLIII

A COURTIER'S DÉBUT

A FEW weeks after the events above recorded, Mervyn arrived in London, and he found that the court had removed to Windsor, to celebrate Christmas in the usual pomp and state of the period. He resolved, however, on resting himself a day in the great city, as well to recover from the physical fatigue of a journey, in those days considered of immense extent, as to inquire into the changes and aspect of the political world. But with what different opinions and eyes did he now contemplate things, with the light of his enlarged experience of the world, and from the elevation of a brilliant position!

The nation was in a ferment, seething and boiling like a witch's cauldron of many incompatible and direful ingredients; and as there was no state-chemist of sufficient skill or power to fuse the discordant materials into a consistent mass, they threatened to burst in some terrible explosion. Republicans, monarchists of all shades and degrees, fanatic and republican conspiracies, a turbulent nobility, a wrathful but silent people, were the ingredients of the witch broth. The wild fervour of religious opinion kindled by the Reformation was at its last but fiercest effulgence, and philosophical observers beheld the most extraordinary spectacle of a most profligate court ruling over a sternly religious people. All parties and factions in the state, to use a paradox which would sound absurd of any other age or people, were at the height of hope and desperation.

The moods and humours of the time could be discerned by an intelligent eye in the smallest scattered particulars, and Mervyn gathered more information, as he wandered through the streets, than many a dullard who was behind the scenes of the great drama itself. Pamphlets on the succession, on the principles of divine right, and polemical tracts, abounded on the booksellers' stalls; and happening to wander into a church, he perceived the immense decline of the Oatesian faction, for there was only a small congregation assembled to hear that great man hold forth in a

vehement harangue against popery. In this grand assault on the Beast, as he called the Catholic Church, he spared no rank, and preserved no decency. The language of Scripture and of the fish-market were used alternately; the Pope, even the King and the court, he assailed with a frothy violence and invective, which drew from his sympathising audience sighs and groans and tears. But Mervyn was unable to endure the agony of recollections which rushed upon him at the mere tones of that splay voice, and burning with indignation, he left the profaned temple of the God of mercy and peace.

The sight of Oates, however, brought his reputed father to his recollection, which, with an indefinite idea of obtaining some information on his mysterious connection with Lady Howard, made him resolve to visit Blood in his confinement in the King's Bench. He took a boat accordingly, crossed the river, and threading a series of rural lanes, arrived under the lofty walls of the prison, crowned with their glittering *chevaux-de-frise*.

Mervyn was admitted by a lugubrious-faced turnkey, whose paucity of words and stoicism of manner seemed acquired by a life-long practice in that dismal receptacle of fortune's wrecks. He looked with much surprise and suspicion at Mervyn when he inquired for Colonel Blood, but pointed laconically to a distant group of racket-players, whose uproarious clamour and huge cans betokened a company of hearty drinkers.

It was a bitterly cold day, and the snow lay in white and glistening masses on the gables and projecting roofs of the huge melancholy piles of building forming the prison. The King's Bench was governed at that time, when prison discipline was little understood, on the sole principle of keeping the prisoners secure, and every species of profligacy was allowed, to the gain of the officers. Gambling and drinking seemed the chief amusements. A regular market was held of all sorts of commodities at an exorbitant rate. Brandy-shops, dice-rooms, and other places of infamous recreation abounded. Some, whose gambling propensities had brought them there, still indulged in the darling ruin, and staked even the rags on their backs. It was the very sink of that wild, profligate, and reckless age. Beaux who had once glittered as the ornaments of courts, ruined merchants, spendthrift heirs, male and

female gamesters, royalists and republicans, stripped equally bare in the up-and-down mutations of fortune, awaited there the great deliverer of all mankind—Death.

As he approached the racketers, the uproar among them seemed to increase. Suddenly arose one of the storms frequent in that fierce atmosphere of human passions, where, the restraints of decency being altogether thrown aside, the savage and brutal nature of man predominated. A crowd rushed around the racketers, and it seemed to Mervyn that two of them were having a furious quarrel. This soon changed into a fight, and when he arrived at the scene of action, he found that one had overthrown his antagonist, and was struggling with him on the ground. The victor, however, soon completed his triumph by dashing his enemy's head against the stones till he was senseless, and then rising, Mervyn recognised in his flushed and brutal features the very man he sought.

Instantly the inexplicable feeling of aversion which had sunk on him when he first beheld the redoubted colonel came over him with renewed force, and he was about to move off with the crowd, which was carrying the wounded combatant to a neighbouring brandy-shop, when, with an effort, he forced himself to advance, exclaiming, "Well, Colonel Blood!"

On hearing the voice of Mervyn, that personage, who was now standing by himself wiping his streaming face, looked up, grew suddenly pale, and staggered back a few steps, with his eyes nearly starting from their sockets. But he recovered himself as suddenly, and extended his hand with a loud assurance that he was as welcome as the flowers of May. Then, observing that there was blood upon his hand, he withdrew it hastily and uttered something like an apology, which suddenly concluded with a burst of tears.

Tears from the eyes of Colonel Blood! Mervyn gazed as doubtfully as if he had seen water spout from a rock. His first reflection ascribed it to maudlin intemperance; and then his heart smote him with the suggestion that it might be the yearnings of affection. He stood hesitating and much embarrassed, but the colonel hastily choked his emotion.

"This is kind of you, lad, kind of you—when all have deserted me but poor Tom—poor Tom Hunt—and he

is in Newgate now," he exclaimed. "You see, I have been having a bit of a breeze—I mean with that cursed rogue, Heron; he thinks, forsooth, to unthrone me, to be cock o' th' alley—as if Colonel Blood, be he where he may—ay, even in a dungeon—will be anything but king of the country. I am glad to see you, boy—glad to see you—looking so well, too—so like—so like a nobleman! How black your hair is turned! Well, well, come this way; I'll treat you—I am not quite a beggar yet."

And he produced a small coin, and then burst into a bitter laugh, and chucked it scornfully away among a crowd of ragged boys.

Mervyn was affected by these visible signs of an anguished spirit, and his consciousness of what the proud though criminal heart of the man must feel under its load of shame and sorrow. He put on a cheerful aspect, however, and invited him to take a bottle of wine in one of the drink-shops at hand.

"No, no—no thin potations for me—no wine!" replied Blood, with the same hollow laugh. "Brandy for me, brandy for me!—Nothing like brandy for drowning care! Come along, boy. I'll show you where they keep right Nantzic."

He then led the way to a tap-house, the goodness of whose liquors seemed vouched for by the roaring merriment going on within. They entered this haunt of Bacchus, and, as well as Mervyn could see for smoke and confusion, found themselves in a dirty tap-room, filled with a drinking, gambling, and fighting mob.

"I always encourage the poor devils here—I knew them when, like myself, they saw better times," said Blood, in a hoarse whisper. "You may remember Bradley, that kept the 'Heaven' in Whitefriars, that night we supped with King Charles and Nell Gwyn. There he is—ah, you hardly know him again—he has drunk himself into an idiot."

Mervyn did indeed perceive a shrunken, starved-looking figure, seated with his legs slinging loose on a barrel, draining a leaden pot, and suffering a part of the liquor to run from his hanging jaws. His wife, still more sluttish than in the olden time, squalid and half clad, ran about, serving the guests; and from her they obtained permission to ensconce themselves behind some barrels, which served

as a kind of bar, and where they could discourse out of observation.

"Good, good! how it warms the heart!" said Blood, swallowing nearly half a pint of brandy at a toss. "Brandy is the only friend that, after ruining a man, is still willing to comfort his misery. Wine, jolly wine and beauty, made you an orphan, Mervyn—I mean of all but your affectionate father. But, by-the-bye, I hear you deny the relationship. I am not your father—am I not? Well, well, if I gave you not life I preserved it, and that is always something in the balance."

"But how did you preserve my life, colonel?" said Mervyn, with affected carelessness.

"But how?" repeated Blood, gloomily. "No matter, it is so—but how is a secret which I must take with me to the grave. Well, boy, I heard of you in the wars—you have behaved yourself like a gentleman, and I do think that they above," he added, with a singular solemnity of tone, "are keeping you for some marvellous purpose. If I would consent to your death now, I might be free this instant—might quit this dungeon, where I am otherwise chained for life. But I will not, I will not—they shall not harm one hair of your head."

"Nay, nay, I know I am not worth ten thousand pounds in your sight," said Mervyn, with an incredulous smile.

"Yes, Mervyn, ten thousand pounds are offered for your destruction!" reiterated the colonel with great energy.

"I should like to know to whom it can be worth so much," replied Mervyn, laughing. "It would almost bribe me to suicide."

"Suicide!" repeated Blood, with a dark and melancholy look at the noble and singularly handsome face of the young man. "Well, well, no matter—but as I said before, how very black your hair has grown! It was as white as flax in your childhood. Oh, Mervyn, what I might have been had I devoted half so much energy, skill, and courage in good as I have in evil! Well, I have wronged you—but for all that, they shall not tempt me to your hurt—no, not with the mines of Potosi!"

"Meanwhile, if anything less than a mine will be of service to you, and as it seems our relationship authorises

me, here is my purse," said Mervyn, touched with a certain impress of truth in the man's vehemence.

Blood looked at the purse with a visible inward struggle, then swallowing another huge gulp of brandy, he clutched it eagerly.

"I shall pay thee some day, lad," he muttered. "The time will come. A man cannot last always, and look how I am shrunk." And he bared his arm to show how distinctly the muscles were visible. "When it comes to *that*, Mervyn, I'll clear matters up for you in style. Besides, these are stirring times—the court cannot do without me. I shall have the King's bail some day, or I will give them leg-bail."

And he again nearly choked himself with a profuse draught of the strong liquor. He then inquired what had brought Mervyn to London, and seemed much struck with the account he gave. But on Mervyn mentioning the King, Blood launched into a vehement invective against him, upbraiding him with ingratitude, in leaving such an old and faithful servant as himself to perish in a prison for a paltry ten thousand pounds.

The transitions of the colonel's mood from dejection to fury were strange and violent; and as he continued to swallow glass after glass of brandy, his Irish temperament passed from extreme despondency to the wildest hopes. He spoke of the favour he still was in at court, of how the King needed him, if he could but get out of these accursed walls.

"They watch me well, for the marshal is held in a heavy bond," he said; "but still I am certain, quite certain, that with a little assistance I could escape. Remember how I saved you from devil Oates, and don't be ungrateful. You will not leave your father to rot in a prison, boy. Do but lend me your dagger, bring me in a crowbar, and have a horse waiting under the little tower that 'buts on St. George's Fields; and if I do not get out—the wall there is old and decayed, and I am certain I could swing myself to the top if there was some one to throw me a rope over."

"You are mad, Master Colonel, to think I will take any share in such a matter," replied Mervyn, on the spur of the moment.

"You won't, ah! then you are a villain and a coward!"

yelled the ruffian, who was now much excited with drink and rage.

"It is well you shield yourself under the name of father," said Mervyn, calmly.

"Well, well, lad, but to leave an old pal in distress," muttered Blood, somewhat less vehemently. "But, at least, lend me your dagger, and I promise you I will work myself out a way with it."

"To murder some inoffensive gaoler? No, by Heaven!" exclaimed Mervyn, warding off the hand with which Blood strove to clutch the hilt of his weapon.

This refusal, obstinately reiterated, set fire to the colonel's irritated feelings, and he swore fearfully at the young man, calling him villain and coward to desert his comrade in such extremity. He railed on so bitterly that at last the persons present began to meddle, and, overcome with disgust, Mervyn rose to depart.

"You are better, Colonel Blood," he said—"you are better here among your fellows, where, plot and murder as you will, you can do no harm. Farewell. Here is the reckoning, hostess."

And he threw the only coin he had reserved on the table, and, bowing ironically to Blood, left him speechless with rage. But he had not gone many yards ere the colonel dispatched a pewter tankard at his head, which, though it missed its aim, was sent with such good-will that it was bent flat against the wall.

CHAPTER XLIV

A ROYAL CHRISTMAS IN THE OLDEN TIMES

Mervyn arrived at Windsor on Christmas Eve, and found the picturesque village in a state of great bustle and preparation for the ensuing festival. The Duke of York had given him a letter to Pepys, the secretary of the admiralty, who was with the court; and by him he was immediately presented to the King. Charles received him very graciously, though he seemed almost to have forgotten his person, and assured him that he was entirely

satisfied with his brother's choice of a captain to his guard. His Majesty then turned to resume a conversation in which he was engaged with his chief page Chiffinch and a gentleman, who, Pepys told our hero afterwards, was John Dryden the poet. They were planning a masque, with which the King intended to amuse the Queen and her ladies on the following day.

Pepys took considerable trouble in installing the young courtier into his new office and instructing him in its duties, and under his auspices Mervyn entered on all his rights and privileges. He held a review of his glittering band, which principally consisted of ancient battered cavaliers, and established himself in his allotted apartments. He gave a handsome supper to celebrate his inauguration, at which Mr. Pepys presided, and where they all got drunk and toasted the Duke of York on their knees. And thus passed his first night at court.

Pepys came early the next day, as well to rouse Mervyn betimes as to see how his magnificent dress, as captain of the gentlemen-at-arms, became the stalwart figure of the young soldier. He was delighted with it, and Mervyn himself was not at all displeased with the splendid figure he cut in the mirror, with his velvets and gold embroidery, especially as he reflected that, in all probability, Mistress Sydney would be present at the festival. But then it occurred to him, with a somewhat chilling effect, that the daughter of Sydney would look with contempt on a gilded slave of the court, as he must now appear to her. But then, again, Pepys assured him that he looked like a costly enamel which he possessed of Francis I., in his young days, when he was reputed the handsomest man of his time. Finally, he commenced his duties by taking up his station in St. George's Hall, where the great banquet was to be held, lining the upper end with his gentlemen, while the yeoman took charge of the staircase and entrances.

The preparations were in the usual gorgeous style of a royal Christmas of the time. The vast hall was hung with silver damask, except where it was adorned with glories of the painter's art, and hung round with graceful arches and festoons of holly and red berries. In the centre of the ceiling was an oval painting, representing Charles II., in the habit of the Garter, with his three kingdoms allegorised around him; and from that hung

a vast bush of mistletoe, in form of a bower, upheld by flying Cupids. There were three tables, extending nearly the length of the hall, spread with crimson velvet and gold plate. Two thrones were prepared at a raised daïs for the King and Queen, covered with rich canopies of cloth of gold. Enormous fires of cedar-wood burned on the marble hearths, and diffused a rich perfume in the air, and crowds of attendants, in all the gorgeous glitter of their several costumes, threw a splendid confusion into the scene.

Some time elapsed ere the pompous bursts of music, and the appearance of the chamberlain with his marshals at the door, announced the approach of the Merry Monarch and his court. Mervyn gazed with strained eyes towards the grand entrance, and at first he could discern only a mass of rich colours, glitter, and waving plumes. But at last objects grew more distinct, and he perceived that the Queen led the procession, leaning on the arm of the Duke of Ormonde, and that the King followed with a lady, to whom he was talking with great vivacity and interest. But words can do but faint justice to Mervyn's sensations when he recognised in the young and supremely lovely woman, whose brilliant eye seemed lit up with coquetry and vivacity—Aurora Sydney herself.

She was changed, but on every point advantageously; the young bud had blossomed into a peerless flower. But there was something more than mere loveliness in her countenance; there was an expression of mingled intellect and feeling, an electric flash in her eye, a brilliancy and sweetness in her smile, which denoted a mind and heart in which lofty and romantic sentiment blended with all womanly softness and tenderness.

Our young hero gazed as if he were enchanted and turned into a statue of admiration. As yet, however, she had not apparently observed the presence of her former *protégé*, probably not dreaming to find him in such a place and presence.

The banquet was served, the court seated, and amidst soft strains of music the festival proceeded. Mervyn had now an opportunity of studying in detail that galaxy of celebrated and profligate wits and beauties, whose decaying splendours still shed a false glare on the sunset of Charles's long reign. But he was absorbed in the beauty of Mistress Sydney, and vainly as he attempted to avert his

eyes, lest his prolonged gaze should attract observation, still they returned, with increased and devouring eagerness, to feast upon the loveliness of her form and features. But a bitter feeling of jealousy mingled, though unconsciously to himself, with this passionate reverie of dawning love. He saw that the King paid her great and marked attention, that he continually gazed and smiled at her, and that with the sparkling coquetry natural in one so young and beautiful, she seemed to delight in his witty gallantries, and repaid him with a vivacity and continued play of imaginative eloquence, which seemed to make the very air around her glitter.

The Queen seemed almost as well pleased as her royal husband with this display, for though she was too much accustomed to his infidelities to notice any new instance of them, she was pleased to observe the manifest vexation of Castlemaine, the haughty frowns of Portsmouth, and the undisguised sadness of merry Mrs. Gwyn, and to know that they were caused by one whose goodness of heart and pride of honour were not to be tempted by all the monarchs of Europe sighing at her feet. Mervyn, however, had no such comfortable persuasion, and though ignorant of what caused the restless aching in his heart, he stood behind the steps of the throne, in an agony of mingled jealousy and anger.

Many of the ladies of that voluptuous court had noticed the fine person of the new guardsman, but Mistress Sydney was too much absorbed in her amusements to do so. She was in the full career of wit and enjoyment, when, happening to turn her smiling eyes from the passionate gaze of the King, she suddenly perceived the young captain leaning with an air of desperate indifference on his massive sword. Instantly the smile died away on her lips, the colour faded from her cheeks, and she looked at him as if she had seen a spectre. On his part, Mervyn flushed a deep crimson, and in affected indifference played with the tassels of his cloak. After a moment, Mistress Sydney turned and made some observation to one of her neighbours, at which Mr. Pepys, who was sitting in the next place, reached over and replied with great eagerness, as if glad to show his information; and thenceforth it seemed as if Mistress Sydney took no further notice of the captain of the gentlemen-at-arms.

The banquet passed off in great splendour and hilarity, enlivened by the most glittering and unscrupulous wit, and on its removal the dessert appeared, but in a novel fashion. The hall of St. George suddenly darkened to a voluptuous twilight, and amidst strains of soft Italian music, entered a group of slenderly-dressed dancers, attired as attendants on Pomona and Flora, and carrying baskets of fruits and flowers, in the most magnificent profusion. As soon as these nymphs had deposited their luxurious burdens, and danced a very intricate ballet, a group of satyrs rushed in and carried them off in their brawny arms, to the infinite delight of the court. The full blaze of light was then restored, and shone upon a scene of festal magnificence rarely equalled even in that gorgeous hall. Thousands of lamps shed their effulgence on the scene, and revealed an immense mass of objects descending the grand staircase, to some strange and roaring music of drums, fifes, and cymbals.

The foremost of these were three figures fantastically dressed, one in clay-coloured robes, another in sea-green, a third in sky-blue—representatives of Earth, Ocean, and Air. These elements knelt at the king's feet, and, in a pompous flow of verse, implored his Majesty's indulgence to a poor Christmas pageant. Permission being graciously accorded, there entered a tall old man in white garments, with long frosty hair. This was Winter, who recited some verses in praise of himself, his sports, and fireside revelries. After him, with a renewed flourish of drums and trumpets, entered in motley pageantry the Abbot of Misrule and all his attendants. A parti-coloured fool of a clerk, and a crowd of fanciful beings, such as fairies, satyrs, men with asses' heads, hobbyhorses, and all the wild paraphernalia of ancient Christmas pastimes, rushed tumultuously in. To avoid giving offence to the Queen, the abbot was garbed more like an eastern sultan than a western monk, but he wore a mitre. After him came a figure with icicles on his beard, very old, but hale and hearty in the visage, crowned with holly, and bearing a rich silver brazier, which glowed under a dish of plums burning in purple and blue flames.

Immediately after this personification of Christmas, came an exhibition which excited full as much awe as admiration. It was a chariot of beautifully-carved mother-of-pearl, lined with blue velvet, and drawn by a tame

lion in harness, whose fierce energies seemed controlled by a little postillion of a Cupid, almost in a state of nudity, with silvery swan's wings on his little shoulders. This Cupid carried a diadem richly wrought with the words "Love's Queen," sparkling in diamonds round the hoop. The procession, led by the Abbot of Misrule, approached steadily, the ladies cowering down as the lion passed, though the poor beast seemed perfectly quiet. Even Charles exclaimed in an undertone, "'Sbodikins, Master John, will you warrant your lion?" to which the dignified bard replied with a neatly-turned verse, showing how love is sovereign of all things, and rules the fiercest creatures as easily as the mildest.

Then began a sweet choir of Italian voices, singing in voluptuous harmony a song in praise of Love and his delights.

Master Dryden then came forward, and in a very grand and majestic strain informed his Majesty that the realm of love lacked a queen, and in the presence of so many most beautiful ladies must continue a republic, unless he would of his good grace appoint a wearer of the crown.

"If Love be a divinity, he must needs know who is the worthiest, and on her let him bestow his crown," replied Charles, with a smile.

"But Love is blind, my liege. What say you, Dan Cupid?" replied the poet. And thereupon the little god began singing a madrigal reply, in a voice of delicious sweetness, for he was in truth a famous musical dwarf belonging to the court.

LOVE'S MADRIGAL

Heart, mine heart! why love we still
So vainly, yet for ever?—
The sunless rose dies, lost to light,
But hopeless love—ah! never;
Still in despite of scorn unkind,
As flames curl higher 'gainst the wind,
Love still loves on—for Love is blind.

Heart, mine heart! though deep, our pain
We will not change for pleasure;
Thy frown, dear maid, is dearer far
Than others' smiles to treasure!
Why yearns the sunflower, still resign'd,
After the sun it ne'er shall find,
But that she loves—and Love is blind!

Heart, mine heart! I would we were
The poorest thing that tends her;
Perchance some unregarded smile
Would pay for all love lends her;—
Alas! to die had not repined,
So she the cypress wreath had twined,
For death is dread—but Love is blind.

"Well, then, Love, lend me heart, and I will lend you eyes," said Charles, gaily; and, taking the crown, he set it on the fair brow of blushing Mistress Sydney. The courtiers smiled, but a keen pang shot through Mervyn's heart. Charles meantime exclaimed, "*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*" and pointed sternly to the motto over his throne, with a glance which spread universal gravity.

The Abbot of Misrule then invited the new queen to enter the chariot, and the King himself handed her in, assuring her she had nothing to fear, and patting the lion on his mane to reassure her. The whole court stood up to see the spectacle, and never did Mistress Sydney look more beautiful than now, when, blushing and smiling with mingled triumph and shame, the King led her down the hall. They had not gone far, however, in a parade round the tables, when a troop of beautiful children, dressed to represent fairies, tripped in, and danced airily round the triumph. But suddenly a hideous roar was heard, and there appeared a dragon with fiery purple scales and broad wings, flaming eyes, and vomiting fire from his huge jaws, a representative of the dragon of old romance.

The fairies took to flight, and the dragon approached the car of the Queen of Love, who looked considerably alarmed and doubtful as to the intentions of this new monster. But as it approached, the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard, and a mounted knight clad in resplendent armour, lance in hand, rode up the hall. This cavalier, by his various ensigns, represented the renowned St. George. His horse's hoofs were gilded and covered with something soft, to hinder them from hurting the marble floor. Two splendid pages in cloth of gold attended at his bridle.

This valorous knight, as if to rescue the Queen of Love, rode full tilt at the dragon, and the dragon at the knight, so that they had just formed with great artifice the antagonistic group on the collar of the garter, when, either startled by the blaze of torches thrown forward, or the cries of the combatants, the lion uttered a roar which soon

showed the admiring spectators the difference between imitation and reality. A universal panic was the consequence, especially as the animal grew furious, shook off his little rider, and made desperate efforts to break his thongs, roaring and churning his teeth. Mistress Sydney shrieked, and Charles and his courtiers looked pale with horror at each other, and the lion, either frightened or exasperated with the noise, suddenly made a tremendous dart forward, by which he broke his harness, and laid his head couching down as if preparing to spring on the chariot. At this moment a strong arm tore the lady from her dangerous pre-eminence, and a broad breast offered itself between her and her terrible antagonist. It was Mervyn! he rushed headlong over the table, snatched the spear from the nerveless arm of St. George, and stood brandishing and quivering it in the air, awaiting the spring of the couchant beast. But to the surprise and delight of all, the animal cowered down with a groaning yawn, probably taking the spear for a whip, with which he was no doubt well acquainted. The keeper now rushed in, secured the lion, and at Charles's command removed it instantly. Meanwhile some ladies had raised the youthful Queen of Love, who had fallen insensible, and were engaged in administering restoratives. The King and Mervyn aided in this, and she soon revived, to pour forth a flood of thanks, seconded by the sweetest blush and the most eloquent tears, frankly acknowledging that she owed her life to the valour of her deliverer, and that she could never repay him.

Charles's satisfaction was equally great, and he showed it in his usual rash and hasty manner. "Come, St. George," he exclaimed, snatching that unvalorous pageant's sword, "I have found a knight worthier to wear true steel than thou!—down on your knees, Mervyn, and rise up one of our best and bravest companions in arms."

Mervyn hesitated, but Mr. Pepys drew him eagerly forward, and in a dream of youthful vanity and triumph he knelt.

"And bear ye all witness," said Charles, raising the sword, "we give you our royal word that this is no carpet-knight we are making; he won us Bothwell by his valour, and saved the country from a bloody outbreak by his prudence. Arise, Sir Mervyn—Sir Mervyn what? or Sir what Mervyn?" he added, after a moment's pause.

The dream was over! Mervyn coloured deeply, and was silent during a brief but dreadful moment. The name of Blood alone occurred to him—that name, the synonyme of daring crime—and the tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

"Have you not two names, then?" said Charles, amidst a general and irrepressible titter. "Well, no matter, it was your mother's improvidence; many a man hath no better claim to the noblest than his mother's assurance. But methought you had the honour to call Colonel Blood your ancestor?"

"He calls himself so, sire; but I had rather be the first of my name than wear one so steeped in infamy!" replied Mervyn, resolutely.

"Right! he is in the shade," said Charles, letting his sword sink gradually. "Well, I cannot dub a knight who hath not two names for the heralds' books. Cannot you claim even a Fitz? Why, by St. George, your face puts one in for you; you are as like the luckless brood of the Aumerles as ever was their most legitimate heir."

Mervyn started. Again that name, which seemed to meet him everywhere by some fatality, crossing his path at such a moment! He almost felt called upon to assume it.

"And he hath already their second title for a Christian name. There's something in it, sire!" said Pepys.

"Well, sir, Fitz-Aumerle shall it be?" said the king, again raising his sword.

"No, sire; I will wear no man's honours but my own; and, until I discover what my real parentage may be, I will have none!" said Mervyn, in a tone of deep but resolved feeling.

"Discover his parentage!" repeated Charles, with a derisive laugh, and tossing the sword back to St. George. "Well, if men will stand in their own light, let them not complain of want of sun! Sir, when you have found these enchanted waters in the Valley of Oblivion, I suppose we shall know how to reward you better."

Mervyn arose, and, bowing deeply, returned like one in a stupefied reverie to his former position as guardsman, his ears ringing with strange sounds, and his sight dim and confused.

There he stood, publicly proclaimed a bastard, with a thousand sneering eyes upon him—so, at least, he thought.

His first clear perception after this miserable scene was seeing the king partake of the Christmas revel, by tasting the flaming snapdragon. The guests thronged round this new point of attraction, and Charles set the example by snatching a burning plum from the furnace. The plums were soon gone, amid screams and laughter, and Christmas tried to run away with the furnace, but he was met by the abbot, who threw a powder into it, which burst into a display of extraordinary coloured lights, and filled the hall with musky smoke. When this cleared up the whole pageantry had vanished, and when the revellers had partaken of the dessert, the tables were cleared for the royal ball.

Throughout the remainder of the feast, Mervyn was as one thunderstruck, and gazed like a figure carved in stone on the spectacle. The revels concluded with a dance under the mistletoe, Charles setting an example, which was eagerly followed, by kissing his partner, Aurora Sydney, under its licensing boughs. Then there was a general scramble for kisses, which concluded the feast, for the Queen put an end to a somewhat rude scene by retiring, and the ladies of course, followed. The meeting broke up as if by enchantment, the splendour dispersed and vanished like a glorious sunset into night, and Mervyn retired to his lonely chamber, in a state of mind almost impossible to analyse, so strangely mingled were love, jealousy, rage, and bitter scorn of himself and all mankind.

CHAPTER XLV

A KING'S WOOING

The Queen returned on the following day to London, and as her retinue of course accompanied her, Mervyn was relieved from the immediate pangs of jealousy, which the King's attentions to the beautiful daughter of Sydney inflicted on him. Stag hunts and other revelries followed, and nearly a month elapsed before Charles thought proper to return to his capital.

Mervyn, meanwhile, obviously grew in the royal favour, and when they returned to Whitehall, a wondrous change

seemed to have come over his fortunes; great and small united in heaping civilities on him; the oldest courtiers predicted his rise; suitors implored his interest in their petitions; in short, it was palpable, even to his own modesty, that he was growing a great man.

On arriving at Whitehall, the King went as usual to pay a visit to the Queen at Somerset House, but to Mervyn's jaundiced eye it seemed as if his only purpose was to see Aurora, her Majesty's favourite attendant. He spent some bitter hours musing over this probability, and it was with very great and almost evident reluctance that he obeyed a summons by Chiffinch to attend the King on his return.

It was night, and Charles was in his bed-room alone, sitting over a bright sea-coal fire, on which, with his own royal hands, he had been mulling some sack. Two little silver tankards and some candied sops were beside him, and a glittering mass of jewels lay scattered about, just as he had thrown them off. The usual attendants of the chamber had all retired, and Charles motioned Chiffinch to disappear, which he immediately did, leaving the King and his gentleman alone.

"Come, boy, draw a stool, and help me to discuss this sack; Falstaff never brewed better," said Charles, pouring the tankards full.

"I drink, then, to your Majesty's good agreement with your new parliament," said Mervyn, forcing a smile, and raising his goblet.

"Drink me not such ill-luck, I charge thee, for I shall never agree with them but when I am signing my abdication," replied Charles, hastily. "It is a death-struggle now between us—either they to Tower Hill, or I to Whitehall window. We are all conspirators, I and my people, and it remains to be seen which hath the better head for plots. It will come to the sword soon, Mervyn; meanwhile, mark you the insolence of this factious Colonel Sydney, and what he hath dared to do."

"What hath he done, my liege?" said Mervyn, very eagerly.

"He hath sent in his daughter's resignation since the affair at Windsor, and will not allow her to come to court again under any pretext."

Mervyn felt a rush of delight which he with difficulty kept concealed, but he said nothing.

"And just when I had all but won her to some little return of my passion," continued Charles—"when she lacked only a fair pretext and a chosen moment to yield! What think you, Mervyn?—did she not seem to eye me favourably? and what woman is insensible to the allurements of power and rank?"

"Your Majesty's experience qualifies you to be a better judge than I can pretend to be," replied Mervyn.

"Doubtless, doubtless. And now to the point on which I summoned you," said Charles, with a smile. "The conclusion to which I have now arrived is to make my passion known to its fair object, and as you have a good pretext to go to Sydney's house to inquire after her health, I intend you to be my ambassador. Do me this matchless service, and matchlessly shall it be rewarded. I authorise you to propose any conditions, and as her father will to-morrow attend the great meeting of the malcontent members, you will have abundant time on your hands."

"And what conditions, sire?" said Mervyn, with a heavy pulsation of the heart.

"Her father a peerage, herself the duchy of Richmond, which I meant for Nell's son once," said the king. "In fact, I will make her my Queen if old Kate dies a natural death; but no poisonings, mind. Think you not this is an offer to tempt an angel, let alone a proud woman of Eve's flesh and blood?"

"Most gorgeous and kinglike. But Colonel Sydney would rather die than accept such glittering dishonour."

"Let him die, then. Why, man, you croak like a ghost from a hollow tree. What ails you?"

"Drinking your Majesty's health in too many bumpers last night," said Mervyn, with some degree of hesitation.

"Take a hair of the dog that bit you," replied Charles, replenishing the tankards. "I hope you are not such a fool as to let any milkish considerations stand in your way to honour and power. Why, boy, you know not what I may do for you yet. Mayhap I shall tire of this new toy as soon as of any other, and then you may come in for a good thing. What say you, Mervyn? I have made dukes of men that had not half your leg. If Castlemaine had not been a proud ass, he might have stood Duke of Cleveland in his lady duchess's patent. And now it reminds me, as the old Sydney is so virtuous, he will need appearances to

be kept up, and if you have a pretty jingling title, and the fat crown lands which Richmond's death made us a present of the other day, would you find it impossible to do as many a better man hath done, and own your heir for your son ? "

" My liege, I am the first of my family, and I intend to be the last," said Mervyn, flushing darkly at this proposition, decently veiled as it was.

" Here, then, is a glittering preface to your discourse," continued Charles, unnoticing this in his own absorption. And taking a little key from his bosom, he opened a golden casket before him, and showed a magnificent set of diamonds sparkling on a crimson velvet bed. " These will incline her to listen to your tale, and since the days of the serpent of Eden no woman could shut her ears to the temptations of power and grandeur. Well, will you be my ambassador ? "

" I will ! " replied Mervyn, desperately. " But I beseech your Majesty not to lay the ill success of my embassy to my fault, if it succeed not—nor the merit to my good, if it succeed."

" As you will—but I have private reasons to conclude that you will not fail," replied Charles, with a somewhat suspicious gaze at the young man. " Bring me the news on the instant, but rest assured that your own fortunes are involved in the event of to-morrow."

And rising, he dismissed the young courtier, in a mood which may be readily imagined.

CHAPTER XLVI

MONMOUTH, SYDNEY, AND RUSSELL

The next morning beheld Mervyn on horseback, wending his way towards Sydney's residence in the village of St. Giles—at that time one of the most pleasant and fashionable suburbs of the metropolis. Chiffinch greeted him at his toilet with a message from the King, exhorting him to use no delay, and with the casket of jewels, which in his hurry he had left behind. But those fatal words, " I have private reasons to conclude that you will not fail," rang in his ear

all night, and deprived him of rest. He now took it for granted that there was some tacit understanding between the King and Mistress Sydney, and it was almost with the mere desperate hope of knowing the worst that he set out on his expedition.

Sydney's house was a very handsome villa, in the old English style. It was bosomed in a large pleasure-ground profusely wooded, and adorned in the Italian style with statues and fountains, all old and moss-grown. There was an air of substance and accustomed dignity about the very waving of the massive oaks which lined the avenue to the house. A colony of rooks had taken up their immemorial abode in the loftiest branches, and cawed about the house with an air of security and vested right. The mansion was originally built in a fine old style, between the Elizabethan and the latter Norman, when strength ceased to be the great desideratum of the architect; but it had received touches and additions from various ages and styles, as it passed through the hands of possessors of more or less taste, and now presented a curious rambling mass of architecture which, incongruous as it was, had on the whole an imposing effect. The garden in front of the house was in the true old English style, narrow, tortuous, fantastic, the shrubs cut into peacocks, dragons, and wasps, the walks trim and precise, and profusely decorated with flowers.

Before, however, our hero had an opportunity of ascertaining all this, he had to summon courage to ring the porter's bell at a massive wicket; and he had reined his horse there several minutes before he dared finally resolve on that decisive measure. The sound of the bell almost startled him when at last he did the deed; and when the porter opened the gate and inquired his business, he could scarcely reply steadily, so strong was the emotion he felt. He asked for Colonel Sydney, whom of all men in the world he least wished to see. The porter answered that the Colonel was out; but in reply to Mervyn's inquiry for Mistress Sydney, he desired him to proceed up the avenue to the mansion.

As he approached it two tall greyhounds came bounding out, and leaping about him; at the same time a lackey, in the simple grey livery of the Sydneys, made his appearance, and civilly inquired his business, on learning which, he said that Mistress Sydney was at home, but that she

had visitors with her. Mervyn desired to be announced merely as a gentleman from the palace.

The domestic led the way into an apartment evidently used as a library and study; it was large and handsome, well hung with books, the window overlooking Bloomsbury Fields and the adjacent garden. There was a glorious blazing sea-coal fire, in which, like all true Englishmen, Sydney delighted, and near that cheerful centre of a winter apartment sat the fair mistress of the mansion and her two guests. Aurora was looking more than usually serious, and, in fact, somewhat embarrassed, for she was playing, seemingly unconsciously, with one of her long ringlets, while the other hand reposed, in its white and perfect beauty, on the rich folds of her black velvet dress. A lace veil which she was embroidering lay beside her on a little work-table, and a pet flower of great beauty bloomed in a fine porcelain pot close at hand. There was a superb Italian virginals, elaborately carved in the finest ebony, open at a little distance.

One of the visitors, and one only, was a stranger to Mervyn. He was a tall well-built man, with a flowing dark periwig, and a countenance somewhat large featured, grave, and even melancholy, but with a character of steadfast and sober resolution, a perfect trustworthiness, in which the merest stranger might have confided, a gravity of eye and demeanour which announced a man not destined indeed to dazzle like a comet, by strange and erratic brilliancy, but to shine for ever, one of the great unalterable stars on which the pilots of English liberty fix their gaze in the wildest storms and the deadliest calms. The other visitor Mervyn recognised, with a start of very unpleasant surprise, as no less a personage than the Duke of Monmouth, whom he imagined to be almost in concealment at the Hague.

"A gentleman from the palace," exclaimed Aurora, rising with some precipitation, as the lackey uttered his announcement. "Ah, is it possible, Captain Mervyn?" she added, with a deep and vivid blush. "Oh, my Lord Russell, I was just telling you my adventure with the lion, and here is the *preux chevalier* who saved my life at the hazard of his own. Captain Mervyn, my lord duke."

"Captain Mervyn and I are old acquaintances, madam," replied Monmouth, with his gay characteristic ease. "We were both at Bothwell Briggs, but he was the first man of us

all that crossed. I am glad to see you, sir, though the times are altered with us both."

And he extended his hand so cordially and frankly, that Mervyn could not avoid giving his, and returning the duke's shake with heartiness.

"Well, I am glad to see your fortunes in full feather," he continued, as they all sat down with a sudden and strange cordiality, produced by the magic of a few words. "But look to it, mine ancient friend: court favour is a bird of an early moult. You see, Master Mervyn, I have taken French leave and returned, for I was wearied to death among the Dutch canals and tulips, and cheesecurd women. Ah, beautiful Mistress Sydney, how often did I sigh among them for the refreshment of one glance at your rich and glowing loveliness, animated by the lustre of the bright spirit within." And he looked with an expression of such passionate admiration at the youthful lady, that although she smiled, she blushed, and Mervyn felt anything but easy in his chair.

"If I may be allowed to say so, my lord," said Mervyn, after a slight pause, "I fear this unlooked-for return will be rather surprising than agreeable at court, and your enemies will be driven to measures which as yet they had not contemplated."

"I do not study much to pleasure my enemies," replied the duke, haughtily. "And the King, my father, and, I trust, the gallant men who pull the oars in the same galleon with me, will see that they do not wreak their spite on me, as they fain would. Besides, the peril is mine, and when was Monmouth false in love, or recreant in hate?"

"When he listened to the Lord Shaftesbury's suggestion, and treated a man who loved him and had served him as an enemy!" replied Mervyn, with sudden warmth.

"Is it possible? then I marvel not at your golden sash and insignia of slavery, since you know *that*," replied Monmouth. "But Shaftesbury was always over-reaching himself, and it was his policy, not mine. I trusted as well as loved you—which you must indeed but too well remember. Well, no more of this! we must be friends at a distance, since fate will have it so. Shaftesbury believes in nothing that is in heaven above or the earth below; and so his projects are continually failing for want of a little human credulity and proper confidence in the folly of man-

kind ; as if all men can see their own interests as clearly as he can ! "

" I wish you success, my lord, in all matters but those in which your true friends would have you fail," said Mervyn, in a calmer tone.

" You courtiers take views on all subjects different from those of men who love their country better than the gewgaw glitter of a tinselled livery," said the Lord Russell, glancing with a quiet smile at Mervyn's splendid dress. " But I confess I did not hope to see a garter-blue mantle in this house, where such plain home-spun as mine own hath long been the only colour in vogue."

And he looked, not without complacency, at his own simple but rich velvet cloak, of a dark russet brown, the favourite hue of the departed times of the commonwealth.

" I do not appraise men by the colour or quality of their garb, my lord," replied Mervyn, with vivacity ; " for I am not now so young in the world as not to know that the signs which men put outermost are rather what they wish others to believe them, than what they are ; the cowl makes not the monk, my lord."

" I would I could think so, sir, of you," said the Lord Russell, eagerly, " for you have indeed excellent parts and qualities, of which our unhappy country, in her bleeding condition, hath too much need. May I then hope that you are here, in the house of the noblest patriot whom England owns, not without some intention or wish of serving her in this great emergency of time ? "

" I am here on business of the King my master," said Mervyn, with a moment's hesitation.

" Then, sir, as the friend, and I may almost say brother, of Colonel Sydney, I demand to know what that business is, for you are aware, since a late matter, he will suffer no further intercourse between the palace and his honourable home," said his lordship, authoritatively, yet with great mildness.

" My lord, you forget ! Captain Mervyn saved my life, and I am sure my father would delight in paying his acknowledgments under his own roof," said Mistress Sydney, in her sweet irresistible manner. " In fact, sir, he would have waited on you in the palace, but that he has made a vow never to enter it till the sealed window of Whitehall be— nay, my lord duke, I say not *that*—but till the legality of that

great constitutional sentence be again acknowledged by a free parliament of England."

"Oh, you are the lion-queller, then, Captain Mervyn?" said Monmouth, in a piqued and sarcastic tone. "I marvel you did not kill and eat him too."

"A labourer with a pitchfork had done as well, and a bear-ward with his whip better," said Mervyn, with a calm smile of contemptuous indifference. "But taking it at the best, lady, it was but a Roland for an Oliver; for if the salvation of so poor a life as mine is worth remembering, you saved me when I was drowning in the Thames that night—that dreadful night!"

"An oyster-smack had done as much, and a press-barge much more," said Aurora, with a playful smile.

"Oh, the delicious romance!—'tis as daintily contrived as anything in Clélie or Cassandre; in fact, I never heard of anything half so good as for a hero and heroine to save each other turn about!" said Monmouth, with a somewhat tart pleasantry. "And to crown the legend, Master Mervyn, you must turn out the son of the great Emperor of Trebizond, lost when a baby by shipwreck on the coast of Flanders, on your way to learn moral philosophy at Athens, from one Master Socrates, who had a scolding wife."

"And till then, I exhort your grace, and all other men, to respect the unknown grandeur of my parentage, as much as I respect that which is certainly known of your own," retorted Mervyn, and the duke flushed dark with his mother's blood in his face, brushed his thick ringlets from his brow, and biting his lip, sat for a moment struck dumb.

"Come, sirs, this is idle raillery," interposed Aurora, smiling, but with evident alarm. "My Lord Russell, I must let you hear your favourite ballad, 'Beauty Forbear' on my new Italian virginals, which Mr. Pepys and his swart Florentine musician declare on their souls is the sweetest ever heard."

"But, my Aury, we must away to the conclave; it is time now to follow your father: the coffee-houses will ring with nothing else but the duke's return," said Lord Russell, in the kind, indulgent tone of a father to his favourite child. "I could hear you sing that lovelorn ditty all day, and all night too, but time holds not at present; meanwhile, I have a word to say to you, darling."

"Then you will come home with my father, and dine

with us, and I will sing you both asleep, with that and the dolorous ballad of the 'Nut-brown Maid,' which he loves so well!" said Aurora, deferring with evident inquietude the aside interview thus solicited.

"Oh, we are too many in the game, my Lord Russell," said Monmouth, rising and snatching his hat in a vexed and petted manner. "There are secrets between his Majesty and *her* Majesty's fair maid of honour, which admit not factious witnesses."

"What mean you, my lord?" said Aurora, with sudden dignity, but blushing very deeply.

"Nay, his grace but jests; no man dare utter such words in earnest in my presence," said Lord Russell, calmly. "But what I meant to whisper to you, Aurora, I will now say aloud—that it is not right, nor according to the duty you owe your father's commands, to receive any messages from the King by any of his satellites, however honourable, as in the present instance."

"Of that, my lord, and of my duty to my father, I am the best judge," said Mistress Sydney, with energy. "I reverence you, indeed, even as next to him; but *he* has not prohibited me from receiving any message with which it may please their Majesties to honour their sometime servant—which, indeed, would ill become a gentleman of my father's birth—only I have pledged my word I will communicate to him the exact nature of those messages, be they what they will."

"That is enough, child; I know your unbending devotion to truth," said Lord Russell, taking her hand and kissing it with chivalrous delicacy. "And now, Captain Mervyn, if you had aught to communicate which might not bear a parent's inspection, you will do well to return with it as firmly locked in your bosom as at this moment."

"I am not here to defend or accuse myself of such a charge, nor to betray my own nor my master's secrets, if I have any," replied the pupil of the Jesuits, with a bitter smile.

"Then, Aury, we take our leave, for the proceedings will be at a standstill with our absence," replied Lord Russell. "Come, my lord duke, we must be active if we would preserve your grace from the consequences of the dangerous step you have taken."

Monmouth smiled with a slight curl of his handsome lip

and a dilatation of the nostrils, as if in contempt of the danger indicated, and made his adieux with the graceful ease of a practised courtier; but as the custom of the times authorised him only to salute the lady's cheek, Mervyn was enraged to see that he ventured to press her rosy mouth, and with a passionate ardour which vexed her too, for her wavering complexion reddened, and her eyes sparkled with anything but pleasure. Finally, however, he took his departure with Lord Russell, and as the door closed on their retreating steps, and Mervyn found himself alone with the lady, he would have given the world to have followed them.

There was a minute's profound and most emphatic pause, during which Aurora seated herself, took up her lacework, set it down, and finally glancing at Mervyn, laughed outright, and with a zest which brought the tears to her bright eyes, and her mirth was very far from diminishing at the troubled and forced attempt which he made to echo it.

"Excuse me, Master Mervyn, be not afraid of me—I am not mad," said she, at last. "But in truth you look as fearfully at me as poor St. George did at my lion. Do you remember? I hope and believe in truth," she added, in a graver tone, "that my Lord Russell's suspicions are totally unfounded, for I will not think that the first man over Bothwell Briggs would offer an insult to an old soldier's daughter. Well, Master Mervyn, you are not, perhaps, in such a hurry, and will give my new instrument the honour of your appreciation."

She seated herself with enchanting grace at the virginals, and, running over the keys, suddenly poured forth a sweet and plaintive old melody, which to Mervyn's tempest-tossed soul seemed a flood of light on a billowy sea. Lost in a luxurious trance of admiration, he gazed in silent rapture on the young siren, and seemed as if he could have gazed for ever without a moment's weariness. But even in this delicious reverie of love mingled bitter thoughts and recollections, involuntarily associated with the great resemblance which Aurora bore to her father, softened as it was by the delicate finish which nature loves to bestow on her female creations. The high profile, the perfect nose, the short and somewhat haughty upper lip, the blue intellectual eyes, even the golden auburn of the hair—all

were so much her father's that Mervyn wondered he had never remarked how very perfect the resemblance was.

As she played, Mervyn gazed at her with eyes in which many passions struggled for expression, and alternately conquered each other—love, grief, jealousy, doubt—but still he gazed, and Mistress Sydney was conscious of the survey. Her voice trembled and wandered, her bosom heaved like a frightened swan's, and blush chased blush over her face and neck. Finally, tears gushed to her eyes, and she broke off suddenly, and then turning with a smile and a deeper blush, she exclaimed, "Oh, you must deem me mad, Master Mervyn, but when I think of these rash intrigues, and how my poor father is mixed up in them—but I know you have something to say. Alas! you look like a ghost with a murder on its mind, shaking its head because one has not courage enough to ask what it means."

"My Lord Russell was right, madam—I *have* a commission from his Majesty," said Mervyn, with the obdurate calm of despair.

"A commission!" she exclaimed, with vivacity; "it must needs be of Oyer and Terminer, from the solemn grandeur of your manner, Master Mervyn."

"It is, perhaps, of little less importance, Mistress Sydney," said Mervyn, with tremulous solemnity; "and here are my credentials."

Saying this he produced the casket of jewels, watching her countenance intently as she took it from him; but exceeding surprise, less at the gift than at the bearer, seemed the principal expression. She did but glance at the curiously-wrought gold of the casket, and then set it tremblingly down.

"Here is the key, madam; the contents are worthy your inspection," said the young courtier, hurriedly; but as she made no attempt to take it, he opened the casket himself, and produced the glittering contents. Aurora's eye, nevertheless, seemed riveted on him alone, with an indescribable mingling of indignation and surprise.

"You are mistaken, sir," she said, at last, with a cold and unnatural composure. "We are both strangely mistaken! These jewels are meant for Mistress Gwyn or my lady Duchess of Portsmouth—but you would have my opinion on the road? Well, they are fair jewels, but the

water is not pure enough for Sydney's daughter—on with them to their destination!"

"I tell you, lady, these glittering gewgaws are from the King—from the monarch of three great realms—to you, and you alone," replied Mervyn. "But as a mere earnest of his favour—a sample of the mine. I need not tell *you*, lady, that he loves you better than a whole Golconda of such glittering trash, and he swears you do not hate him."

"Are these jewels from the King to me—and are you the bearer?" said Aurora, in a firm but hurried tone.

"I am the bearer, and the jewels are yours," replied Mervyn, folding his arms with stern composure.

The daughter of Sydney raised her eyes, sparkling with indignant lustre, and for the first time she met his gaze unblenchingly, without smile or blush. There was a dead pause of many seconds, which might have been counted by the ticking of the ancient timepiece set in the carved chimney front. At last, coldly sinking her eyes, she said with a slow and sorrowful expression as if bidding farewell to some long-cherished hope, "I looked to see if it could be the Mervyn whom I remembered. Well, you have deceived some better acquainted with the world's disguises than a simple girl. I am much beholden to his Majesty; 'tis a princely gift," she continued, lifting the jewels, tears standing in heavy dewdrops in her eyes. "How beautiful they are, how they sparkle! yet after all they are only glittering glass, like men's outward show of honour and faith. Will this chain become me, Master Mervyn?" she said, throwing the string of diamonds on her fair neck, and placing the ruby heart affectedly on her bosom.

"Admirably, madam; pearls for Diana, but diamonds for Venus!" replied the youth, bitterly.

"And what for the go-between, Mercury?" said Aurora. "At what rate doth a man's honesty go at court? What will a friend's betrayal fetch? At what price do you sell your sisters there? I would not have you go without a reward. Please you, sir, to aid me clasp this marvel of a bracelet. Why, 'tis one mass of lucid glitter."

Mervyn fastened on the bracelet, though his lips whitened, and his hand quivered like the needle of a compass.

"And now, sir, may I ask you," she continued, noting his agitation with a woman's quick eye—"may I ask what lucky lightness was it you observed in me, what fortunate

sign of utter worthlessness, which encouraged you and your royal master to believe this present would be acceptable to Aurora Sydney ? "

"His Majesty is notoriously a Solomon in such light matters as women's inclinations, madam," replied Mervyn, excessively piqued. "The whole court observed and noted your favourable acceptance of incense from so great a censer ; you cannot play with flame and leave the game unscorched ! What particular reasons his Majesty hath for believing his adoration not unacceptable at your beauty's shrine, *I* know not, but the general lightness and caprice of your sex, madam——"

"Lightness !—caprice !—my lightness !—my caprice ! know you to whom you speak, sir ? " exclaimed Aurora, colouring high with indignation. "My lightness ! dear Heaven ! have I lived to hear those words from your mouth ? But go on ; more remains unspoken ; I see it in your eye ; let me know the best of your tidings, if better follow."

"His Majesty," said Mervyn, whose pallid quivering features now presented a curious contrast to the burning glow on the lady's cheek and brow—"the King's Majesty—is so encouraged—believes so in your goodness—in short, madam, here is a paper signed by his own royal hand—a blank—fill it up with what conditions you please. A scratch of your pen makes your father a peer, yourself Duchess of Richmond, an escheat which his Majesty is anxious to confer on you—wealth, riches, power—a future crown—*but no poisonings, no scaffold !* The Queen dead and in her coffin—to be brief—your ladyship may wear her crown."

"Give me the paper, sir ; how must I merit these enormous honours and favours ? " said Aurora, blushing and paling in rapid alternation. "I cannot fight for the King, plead for the King, corrupt parliaments for the King ; what must I do to be thus rewarded by the King, when he suffers the men who bled for him to die of absolute hunger ? Alas ! I cannot even play your villanous part —bear false witness against my country's patriots, or betray to shame the daughter of the man who saved my life."

"The service is mighty easy, madam," replied Mervyn, trembling with anger ; "only to love the King, and to

occupy my late Lady Castlemaine's apartments in the palace—that is all."

"Why, I have heard they are right royally furnished, silver damask the meanest hanging," replied Aurora, with strange calmness. "And is this all? but it must seem little to you; infamy is doubtless hereditary in your family; but I have the misfortune to be descended from a hundred sovereign knights, who have many times made the crown of Scotland sit loose on the brows of *his* ancestors. My grandfather Northumberland's name was Percy, and my father's name is Sydney; that is my only reply. Take back your jewels to your master, and beseech him to confer them on some worthier object, whom his duchies may ennoble; and for yourself, bid him, when he next sends an ambassador on such an errand, let him have an ancestry to disgrace."

Mervyn stood as if petrified with rage and shame; he could not speak, and Aurora, who was vainly endeavouring in her indignation to unclasp the bracelets, at last burst into tears, and hid her face in an agony of grief in her hands. Then starting suddenly up, she exclaimed, "Fool that I am to show such weakness! 'tis my unripe acquaintance with the world to marvel thus at men's baseness. But you have taught me a great lesson, and I thank you. I took you to be a nobleman of nature's heraldry, but I find you a poor dishonourable slave, whose base soul matches his base birth!"

"Perchance—perchance!" said Mervyn, quivering as if beneath the knife. "But it is impossible that a woman in her senses can reject so magnificent an offer! Reflect, madam! perchance you throw away a crown! The Catherine of his Majesty's ancestor, Harry the Eighth, stood not long in the light of his new love, and——"

"Oh! I comprehend; your wages depend on your success!" said Aurora, vehemently. "Stay, stay—give me the paper, I will certify that you have done your best; you shall not miss your hire." And snatching the paper, she wrote with singular steadiness the following words: "These presents are to certify to the King's grace that the villain he employed hath performed his villanous task villanously well.—Aurora Sydney." And then, throwing it to Mervyn with the casket, scattering its contents thereby on the floor, she rushed to the door, weeping and sobbing

with mingled grief and indignation ; but ere she reached it, Mervyn caught her hand in a clutch which seemed of iron.

" I forgot, I forgot—you lack the chain ! " she sobbed, making an effort with the other hand to disengage it. " But do not think to frighten me—I am Sydney's daughter —I will not be held, sir ! Unhand me, or I call on those who will chastise this insolence—glare at me as you will—if you were a famished wolf, I fear you not—not anything after this."

" Hear me, Aurora—you shall hear me ! " said Mervyn, vehemently. " Hear me, and for the last time. I have wronged you ! I dared to think that power, that wealth, that a King's love, could tempt you ; and I—I who would rather turn this vast globe into one great charnel-house than suffer another's lips to breathe the heaven of yours !—I who love you, dote on you, worship you even to the poorest thing you smile on !—I who would die to win one tear of yours on my grave—I have been the tempter ! Can you not fathom the black depths of my despair ? It was my love, the very desperation and madness of love, which drove me to this trial ; but rest satisfied, you are avenged. You have crushed for ever all the hopes which bloomed in the dark desert of my life ; and henceforth all is useless, cheerless, barren, and still as death. You have dashed me back into my nothingness. I am now what Nature meant me to be when she sent me base-born upon the earth—a reptile for every foot to spurn ! "

" It is impossible—you cannot love me, or you would rather have plunged a dagger in your own heart than have done the King's bidding in this matter," said Aurora, vehemently, but allowing herself to be led back to her seat.

" Not love you ! not love you ! " he repeated, wildly. " Oh, I have loved you all my life, before even I saw you, for are you not the embodied form of all those vague dreams of beauty which haunted my earliest childhood ?—which I sought yearningly, but oh, how vainly ! in all things that partake of the divine spirit of beauty—the lustrous darkness of night, the glory of noonday, the all-reflecting ocean of poetry in which the universe mirrors itself !—eloquence, battle, music, pleasure !—in all have I found the same deep void which only love can fill. Not love you ! " he continued with wild fervour, and throwing himself on his knees, covering both her hands with burning kisses. " Oh,

Aurora! I swear it! I love you better a million times than myself—better than all things else, here or hereafter."

"Go and tell the King so, and I will believe you," said Aurora, still weeping without intermission. "Till then—but that is for ever—farewell!"

She made an effort to shake her hand loose, but Mervyn still held it clasped in his own. "You shall not leave me," he said; "you shall not leave me in utter desperation. I am a beggar, a base-born slave, it is true—but I am human. Say only you forgive me—that you believe me!"

"I will not—I will be forced to nothing, sir!" she exclaimed, and at that moment the sound of approaching footsteps was heard. "Oh, rise, rise!" she continued, in agony. "It is my father—I know his step—rise, rise!"

"Never—till you pronounce my forgiveness! I cannot die better than now and here, if he slay me."

"Well, well, I forgive you and believe you—only tell the King I hate him," she said, hurriedly, and he sprang up, pressing her hand to his pale lips; but at the same moment the door swung open, and three or four gentlemen made their appearance, foremost of whom was Colonel Sydney.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE DUELLO UNDER THE *ANCIEN RÉGIME*

SUDDENLY as Mervyn arose it was too late to shun detection, and he stood as if lightning-struck, while Aurora vainly attempted to hide her gushing tears.

"Heyday, what is here?" exclaimed Sydney, after a petrified silence of several minutes, his eye glancing from his daughter to Mervyn, and thence to the jewels which lay scattered on the floor.

"Nothing, nothing, dearest father; nothing but that Master Mervyn asked my opinion on these jewels, and—and I overset the casket."

"And this chain—how came it round your neck, Aurora?—and these bracelets?" said Sydney. "Why, by Heaven, I saw these diamonds at the King's jeweller's. What

manner of knave is this here, flaunting his base livery in my house ? "

" It is the gentleman of whom we spoke. But be calm, Sydney," said the Lord Russell. " I see it all. Doubtless this is a present from the King."

" And you have accepted it, girl ? " thundered Sydney, turning colourless with passion.

" Judge yourself, Colonel Sydney," said Mervyn, in a mood of tranquil desperation, and handing the *carte blanche* which Aurora had filled up in such bitter terms. Sydney glanced at the signature, and his eyesight seemed almost to fail him, for he gave it to Russell, exclaiming, " Read it ! " in a deep and gasping tone. But Monmouth, who was also there, snatched and read it aloud, with strong emphasis on every epithet. Brave as he was by constitution, Mervyn trembled when the colonel turned his flashing eyes upon him.

" Spy ! slave ! seducer ! " shouted he, at the pitch of his powerful voice. " Think you this roof shall protect such baseness, thou worthy son of the blackest scoundrel in England ? Draw ! " And his sword flashed at Mervyn's breast, but the young courtier neither drew nor budged a single inch.

" No, no, he did it but to try me," shrieked Aurora, clinging to her father's arm. But he dashed her aside with violence, and, before any one could interfere, again his sword wavered within a hair's breadth of Mervyn's breast, but he never flinched.

" Strike, Colonel Sydney," he said, calmly folding his arms. " I acknowledge that these jewels are from the King, that I brought them, and that your daughter here has rejected them with scorn. Strike ; I shall not balk your stroke."

" No, colonel, this is matter for a younger sword," exclaimed Monmouth, advancing and drawing his with a graceful flourish.

" Howard, aid me—they are both mad," exclaimed Lord Russell. " Colonel Sydney, this is neither the place nor time—for Heaven's sake, consider—your daughter's reputation must needs suffer in any such brawl, be the truth as it may."

" This pandarous rogue is not fit food for a gentleman's sword," said Howard, with supreme contempt and insolence

of manner. "Rogues like these are best corrected by the cudgels of one's valets. Ho, Ralph, John, Lucas."

"Fly, fly, Mervyn, if you would not kill me," said Aurora, clinging wildly to her father. "Oh, go, go—on your lives, let him pass," she exclaimed, as two or three lackeys, headed by the greyhaired butler, ran in, alarmed by the uproar.

"Kick the villain out, and send his trash after him," shouted Sydney. "He hath insulted my daughter—at him, rascals!"

"Prithee, sirs, value your lives so far as not to come within arm's length," said Mervyn, with a demure ferocity of manner which effectually stopped the warlike advance of the lackeys. "Farewell, colonel; you will hear me some day when you have more leisure, and perhaps it shall be found I was not deserving of this bitter rebuke. Farewell, lady—I have ever honoured you, and will to the latest breath of my ever-luckless life."

"Stay, sir, take your jewels with you, and my daughter's certificate—you may insert it in your patent of nobility," said Sydney, mastering his passion with a strong effort and dropping the point of his weapon. He then tore rather than took the chain and bracelet from his daughter, who stood passively, and white as snow with terror, and heaping them all into the casket, threw them towards the unfortunate bearer. Meantime Mervyn, who felt that indignation was rapidly getting the better of his reason, made his way to the door, with his hand on the hilt of his sword—but no one offered him obstruction. He crossed the lawn at a leisurely pace, and as he went he thought he could hear Monmouth's bitter laugh. As he leaped into the saddle, the butler ran to him with the casket, and muttered something which Mervyn neither heard nor heeded, but snatching the casket, he dashed the spurs into his horse, and was almost instantly out of sight.

To analyse the confused thoughts which crowded upon him during his gallop to Whitehall would be almost impossible. Burning resentment at the insults which had been heaped upon him; wonder at his own folly or baseness in undertaking an office which had so justly drawn them down; amazement at the strange avowal into which he had rushed, of a passion which until that moment he had never imagined held such powerful sway in his breast—

whose existence he scarcely acknowledged to himself—all these feelings assailed him by turns and in masses. The light in which his conduct must appear to Sydney and his daughter struck him with a new and appalling glare, and yet withal, the certainty which he now had of Aurora's contempt for his royal rival was in itself a consolation for every ill. Then he reflected with bitter and gnawing shame on the avowal he had made, that he—the outcast beggar and bastard—had dared to love a descendant of the princely Sydneys, the granddaughter of the great Northumberland! That she had not spurned him with supreme scorn, he only imputed to the dominion of the previous emotion he had raised in her proud heart, whose intensity absorbed all minor passions.

Anon Mervyn's thought concentred into one focus—hatred of his imperial rival; and he determined instantly to make him a sharer in the misery he had caused. On arriving at the palace, however, he found that the King had set off suddenly to Oxford, to open the parliament which he had summoned there—the last of his reign. The sudden return of the Duke of Monmouth, and tidings of the bold projects afoot in the powerful party which supported him, had precipitated this departure by a few hours. But Chiffinch remained, with instructions that Captain Mervyn was to follow the King to Oxford immediately. The latter made no delay, and the next morning saw him entering the ancient city.

Short as the sitting had as yet been, the parliament had exhibited the most refractory spirit; it was evidently in the hands of the popular party, who seemed resolved to push their victory to the farthest bounds. The Commons elected an obnoxious speaker, quarrelled with the Lords on Fitzharris's impeachment, and introduced their beloved bill, excluding the Duke of York from the succession.

Mervyn found the usually quiet and monastic city changed into an arena of tumult, and crowded with armed men, for the London Members went to Oxford with a numerous body of well-appointed horse. Parties seemed pretty equally divided in the commonalty, the exclusionists being distinguished by purple ribands in their hats, with a lackered tin label of "No Popery! No Slavery!"

Mervyn found the King taking his chocolate, and still in his brocade morning gown and slippers, attended by two

or three of his unpopular ministers, and some of the loyal gentlemen of the neighbourhood. He seemed to be in a very moody temper, speaking to no one, and the courtiers were whispering around, none daring to break the silence, when Mervyn entered. Charles noticed him directly, from his riding-dress, which he had not time to change, and a smile suddenly lighted up his dark features. "So, Master Mervyn, from your mission, ah? he exclaimed. "What news, good or bad?"

"Nay, very bad, my liege," replied Mervyn. "Your hawk gentle has proved a haggard, and the falconers cannot lure her to the jesses with whistle or meat."

"Say you so, Master Mervyn?" replied Charles, scanning his pale and careworn features attentively. "Well, though it be unjust, 'tis the world's way—to reward the messenger according to his tidings, so thine will be something less than a dukedom."

He then rose, and making a sign to the courtiers, all retired, making a profound obeisance; only Mervyn remained, and the King, with an appearance of much emotion, desired him to relate all that had happened. It may be readily imagined that the youth kept nothing concealed but his own outburst in the affair, not a single phrase of contempt used by Sydney or his daughter escaped his vigilant memory; insomuch that Charles stared at him in dumb amazement. It was a sort of balm to his own wound to enlarge on these unpleasant particulars, and his satisfaction increased when he saw how Charles smarted under the lash. His swarthy complexion grew of a fiery red when Mervyn produced the paper and the casket of jewels, and he smiled with a dark and revengeful bitterness when he read Aurora's "certificate."

"God's life! these people grow too insolent," he said at last, folding the paper. "But the time is coming when they shall know who is master in England; and I swear I will so avenge me on this presumptuous daring brood of Sydneys, that men shall in after times quote them for a proverb of royal vengeance. But think not, Master Mervyn, though you discourage me so much, that I will give up my chase. I have now the additional motive of revenge, and I needed none to spur me on to impossibilities rather than fail in subduing this haughty beauty. You may retire, Master Mervyn."

The young courtier obeyed, and during the remainder of the short stay of the court in Oxford, Charles took little notice of him, and his favour was obviously on the decline.

Meanwhile, Shaftesbury and his colleagues obstinately pressed their bill against the declared resolution of the King, and it had passed the second reading when Charles resolved on that extraordinary measure which is one of the phenomena of his reign—the dissolution of a parliament which had scarcely met. This surprising step of prerogative suddenly broke all the plans of the popular party, dispersed their powerful union, and put an abrupt termination to the intrigues and crafty machinations of Shaftesbury. The court returned immediately to London, leaving Oxford in a state of the wildest uproar.

The day after Mervyn's return to Whitehall, a new trouble, on which he had not hitherto calculated, joined itself to his previous embarrassments. A large pile of bills for various articles of dress and his splendid uniform, lay upon his table, with modest requests for payment. Now, although Mervyn was ostensibly in the receipt of a very handsome salary, he had not received a single broad piece of it; and such was the utter confusion and disorganisation of the government, that it seemed very doubtful whether he ever should. His brain was holding a sort of committee of ways and means, not with the romantic hope of discharging the mass, but in assigning little sums as a put-off to each, when an unexpected visitor made his appearance. This was the Lord Howard, glittering in one of those magnificent garbs in which he delighted, of violet velvet and silver, which showed off his figure to advantage, for he was still remarkably handsome, though worn with deep traces left by a long course of profligacy.

"*Bon jour, mon cher,*" he said, throwing himself negligently into a chair.

"My lord," said Mervyn, after a moment's surprise, "allow me to ask to what I am indebted for the undeserved pleasure of your society, which I meant at another time to have desired in another place, for I am by no means satisfied with the part it pleased you to take in a recent transaction."

"I did not intend to please you, Master Mervyn, but myself, in that," replied Howard, coolly. "I wait upon you on behalf of Colonel Sydney; choose your weapon,

but if the sword hits your fancy, here is the length of my friend's, and the breadth too."

"On behalf of Colonel Sydney!" repeated Mervyn, with a start.

"Ay, you are not so surprised at that, Master Mervyn," said Howard. "You must needs have conjectured that the colonel would not put up with such an affront as you have offered to his beautiful daughter; and since your principal is too high to be got at, you must fight as well as woo for him."

"I am content, my lord, to do so against all the men in England but Colonel Sydney—yourself in particular!" said Mervyn, fiercely.

"I am obliged to you for the preference, sir," replied Howard, calmly; "but at present I must do my duty to my employer, and I request you to choose your weapons."

"I will not fight Colonel Sydney," said Mervyn, with feigned indifference.

"Not fight him, sir! then he will cane you in some public presence," said Howard, vehemently.

"Tell Colonel Sydney from me," replied Mervyn, with visible agitation, "that I am not so guilty as he supposes, but I cannot as yet prove mine innocence; meanwhile, I will not, to save my life, lift my sword against his."

"Nonsense, it will not do. Aurora has failed to make her father believe this stuff, and how should you?" said Howard, scoffingly.

"But tell the colonel," continued Mervyn, "if he will send me any other opposite, yourself, or a better man, I will fight a summer's day to pleasure him."

"Bah! bah! you are not fool enough to expect it, or think to balk the affair with this blustering dastardy," replied Howard.

"Draw, then, or you are no better than a dead dog!" shouted Mervyn, now thoroughly enraged, and springing up he drew his sword with a flash.

"Not here, certainly; I am not to be fooled into having my hand struck off for drawing in the King's purlieu," said Howard, neither rising nor assuming any attitude of defence. "But if you are really serious, Master Mervyn, and will not fight with Colonel Sydney at any price, I accept your challenge, for I shall be most proud and happy to do Miss Sydney

justice on your insolent bastardship, and to appear in the lists as her champion."

"This evening, then—in the Mall!" exclaimed Mervyn, colouring darkly. "Promise me, or you shall not stir from this chamber."

"I do promise, but from no terror of your threats," replied Howard. "I shall see Colonel Sydney in an hour in the city, where we are to meet on this matter of the dissolution; and I can readily put him off with some excuse, as that you are in close attendance on the King at present. But hist! what is that at the door?—'tis something louder than a wench's rap."

Mervyn sheathed his sword hurriedly as the door opened, and a tall figure, wrapped in a long military cloak, his countenance concealed by a black visor and a hanging plume, stepped boldly in. He started back a step or two when he saw that a stranger was present, but Mervyn readily recognised the King by his peculiar gait and the momentary opening of his mantle, which revealed his rich garb beneath. Chiffinch was behind, in a plain burgher dress, as was usual with him when he attended the King on his private excursions, of which, like Haroun al Raschid, but seldom with such good motives, he was very fond.

"Come in, Master Fenton," said Mervyn, with ready intelligence; "here is only a gentleman who is taking his good company away, and you have come in time to share my tediousness."

Charles glanced scrutinisingly at the figure before him, and, slightly raising his hat, threw himself into a chair at the window, whence he looked perseveringly until the Lord Howard departed, which he did after a survey which fully repaid the royal curiosity. Mervyn escorted him to the head of the stairs with ceremonious civility, and, as they parted, requested him to expect him at the place of appointment till dark, as he did not know how long he might be detained by the King.

"Was that old Charley, then? I thought so," replied Howard, smiling. "But how he alters in everything, even in person! His face grows blacker and blacker, like his heart; and his debauched youth will have the cruel and remorseless age of Tiberius, if we do not choke him betimes. They say he has already got his island of Caprea in these

Mulberry Gardens, ostensibly kept by that infernal hag of a witch-devil, old Moll Creswold."

Mervyn paid little attention to this effusion of loyalty, for he was absorbed in conjectures on the King's business with him in his disguise, and he returned immediately.

"Yonder was my Lord Howard, ha, Mervyn?" said the King, sharply, as he re-entered. "I thought no friend of mine consorted with such a rank rogue of the faction as that, ha! But Chiffinch is, I am afraid, right; you are but half-hearted with us, Master Mervyn, and think to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds at once. This will not do; he who is not with me, heart and soul, is against me, heart and soul; and I will trample him, or he shall me."

"The Lord Howard is no friend of mine, sire," replied Mervyn; "so far to the contrary, that he but now was here with a challenge from Colonel Sydney for the part I took lately in your Majesty s behalf."

"A challenge—umph!—and you have accepted it, of course?" said Charles, with an earnest look at his young captain. "By Heaven! Mervyn, you could not do me a better service at this moment than to rid me of that old pestilent right honourable Don Quixote Junius Brutus of a cursed old leveller and Cromwell man, with his republic in the air, and his dangerous projects on earth."

"No, sire, I have refused his challenge; I cannot raise my sword against the man who saved my life," said Mervyn, with affected calmness.

"Saved your life—truly, truly," said Charles, with evident displeasure. "I heard for the first time from Chiffinch that your intimacy at Mistress Sydney's had been of such long standing: and there are not wanting those, Master Mervyn, who insinuate that your pleading the other day injured your client rather than your reputation for eloquence."

Mervyn coloured deeply, but he made no reply, and Charles seemed still more restless and dissatisfied.

"Why, man," he said, "Colonel Sydney will think little of caning you some day in the park, or at the playhouse, or mayhap in my very presence, if you refuse to meet him like a man. But I warrant we will bring down his pride some of these fine days, and make him glad to market his submission, since he can do no better. But put on your cloak, Mervyn: we are for a sally to the Mulberry Gardens,

for old mother Hecate there writes me word she has added a fresh young rose to her garden."

This was the first time that Mervyn had ever been asked to accompany the King on these scandalous rambles, in which he too frequently indulged, and though his heart swelled high with loathing, he did not venture on a refusal; but Charles noticed his hesitation.

"Come, Chiffinch," he said, with a malicious smile, "I trust we shall put Master Mervyn in better humour with his excursion, when he knows whom we shall see at the end of it. Guess me my new love's name, and if you hit on the right one within the hour, I will make you a Knight of the Garter at Whitsuntide."

Mervyn mentioned a variety of those to whom he had seen the King pay attention, but not the right one, as appeared from the extravagant peals of laughter into which both his page and himself burst.

"Thou wouldst guess wrong till Whitsuntide," he said, at last; "'tis even thy impenetrable rock of virtue, Aurora Sydney."

Had it not been that Charles's attention was turned on the glittering river below, he must have augured strange things from the start and sudden paleness which covered Mervyn's face. As it was, the tone in which he pronounced the word "Impossible!" struck him, and he turned.

"You shall see that anon, Master Mervyn," replied Charles, coldly. "I mean not to say that she is there by her own good will, but she is there."

"But by what marvellous contrivance?" exclaimed Mervyn.

"It is all Chiffinch's work, aided by cunning old Creswold," replied Charles, and the gratified page bowed joyfully to the royal glance of approbation. "Sydney is at one of the factious meetings in the city, and Chiffinch got a Jew, one Elkanah, to imitate the colonel's hand (which he can do marvellously of all men), and writes word that chancing to meet you on the way, Master Mervyn, swords were drawn, and you came off the better, leaving the old gentleman for dead on the path; but some charitable squire picks him up, and removes him to his own house, where he lies in great danger, and sends two or three lackeys with his coach to bring the lady directly. And so off comes

Mistress Aurora in a fit of distraction, and is now safely lodged at Madam Creswold's."

Mervyn still grew paler, but his resolution was taken. Decision was one of the marked peculiarities of his character, and the pupil of the Jesuits perceived that on this occasion it must display itself in act but not in word. He even enforced a smile, and protested that it was the most excellent plot he had yet heard of among all those that plotting age had produced. Charles exchanged a bitter smile with his obsequious page, and then arose to proceed on his laudable enterprise. Mervyn threw a cloak over his own dress and followed.

They left the palace by a back way, and found a hired coach waiting at the door, into which they got, and the driver was directed to the Mulberry Gardens.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE MULBERRY GARDENS

The gardens distinguished by the above pleasant epithet were at one period the favourite resort of sober citizens and their wives, who went to enjoy the delicious fruit for which they were long famous; but the corruption of the age had involved even this innocent and rational pleasure, and the Mulberry Gardens were now frequented only by the dissolute of both sexes. They occupied the present site of Buckingham Palace, and on the descent towards St. James's stood a house which had once belonged to some ancient and honourable family, but was now in possession of Mrs. Creswold. It had a peculiar garden of its own, separated from the mulberry groves by a high park paling, and after passing through the former, they arrived at a wicket which admitted them into the immediate purlieus of the mansion.

Charles led the way with a practised step through the windings of a small but very beautiful garden, gathering as he went a nosegay of sweet flowers. He seemed to be in the gayest humour possible, and Mervyn followed in a mood of resolved desperation, which even allowed him to laugh

and bandy wit with the King, the better to conceal the purpose in his heart.

A tall building, with high gables and projecting windows, stood at the end of a row of elms, and up that they wended their way. As they proceeded an old woman, hobbling on crutches, appeared hastening to meet them. Her real age might be about forty, but she looked nearly a score older, and her body was bent almost double. Her whole countenance was one continued pucker of wrinkles, and the skin lay in bags round her jaws, while her lips had the fiery freshness and her eye the moist sparkle of perpetual intoxication. A heap of tattered grey hairs hung round her head, half hidden by a mob-cap, but she was very grandly bedizened in laces and velvet. This was Moll Creswold; but how changed by disease and debauchery from her whom we introduced at the beginning of this history, young, fresh, and handsome!

"Oh, Mr. Rowley, such a to-do," exclaimed the beldame as she approached—"such a to-do! I thought I must have gone distracted."

"Why, now now, goody?" said Charles, sharply.

"Oh, dear! the poor thing has been in faintings ever since she arrived and found out the trick. 'Twas as much as we could do to keep her alive. In vain I pointed out her happiness—she would not hear me, and she is now sobbing and crying like the rain."

"Poor soul! I must go and comfort her," said Charles, putting his nosegay coquettishly in his breast. Mervyn's heart swelled high, but he said not a word. Charles looked at his compressed and bloodless features, and motioned to Chiffinch, who, with evident reluctance, made up to Mervyn, and invited him to eat some fruit and drink a bottle of wine with him in an arbour at hand, which was laid out with some such preparations. Mervyn nodded mechanically, and with a smile full of hate and scorn, Charles turned away, muttering, "*Io triumphe!*" in a low but very audible tone. He then went on with Mrs. Creswold for guide.

The young courtier watched his master in profound silence till he disappeared in the house, and Chiffinch trembled, though he pretended to eat some peaches in the arbour very diligently. But when Mervyn turned, he involuntarily started.

"Master Chiffinch, you seem fond of peaches," said he,

in a tone of calm determination. "Continue to eat, and no harm shall happen to you; but dare to follow me only one step, raise but the least alarm, and I will return and stab you a million times with this dagger." And he drew a long poniard from his belt.

"Lord save us, Master Mervyn! you do not intend to harm the King's Majesty?" said Chiffinch, shrinking down with fear.

"I will save Aurora Sydney, though it cost all the kings on earth," said Mervyn, his eyes sparkling with rage, and striding forward.

"Master Mervyn, look to it—you ruin yourself, and do no good to Miss Sydney," exclaimed Chiffinch, clutching his cloak, but relinquishing it instantly, as the youth turned fiercely round. "Prithee, glare not at me like a mad tiger—I tell you, as a friend, Master Mervyn, your interference will only bring down ruin on your own head. The King is informed of all your treasons, and it is to revenge himself on you that he has brought you to be as it were an abettor in his success. But if you take it quietly and behave like a reasonable man, Master Mervyn, his Majesty will doubtless pardon you, and——"

"Wretch! slave! withdraw your loathsome hand, or I do the hangman's business on you and smite it off!" shouted Mervyn.

"I warn you, sir, the house is haunted by a banditti who would as soon throttle you as dogs a rat," exclaimed Chiffinch.

"I care not—avoid me, toad, viper, reptile!" said Mervyn, dashing him back with violence, and striding rapidly up the avenue.

"He will do some madness—the strong idiot!" groaned Chiffinch. "Master Mervyn, for your own sake, rush not on destruction. 'Tis scarce a fortnight since, groping about in the dark, I found a fellow hanging in one of their wardrobes, and his body was doubtless shoved into a dusthole without a soul on earth being the wiser, Master Mervyn!"

But he had disappeared behind some trees, and after a moment of intense deliberation, Chiffinch determined to follow him at a respectful distance, hoping that the young man's rashness would have cooled ere he reached the house.

Mervyn, however, arrived at the portal in a mood of

increased instead of flagging desperation. It was completely overhung with vine and honeysuckles, which filled the air with a sweet perfume, though he heeded it not ; but on attempting the door, he found that it was double-barred within. Conscious that it would be useless to try and enter by legitimate means, he looked round for some window by which to enter ; but he found all those within reach secured by massive iron bars. His quick eye, however, noticed a slender staircase window at a considerable height, close to which waved the topmost branches of a fine cherry-tree. His resolution was taken instantly. Clambering among the branches with the vigorous activity of youth and passion, he gained some of the highest, which were so slender that they seemed scarcely able to bear a child's weight, and then by a desperate spring he caught the sill of the window. Here he hung for a moment at full length, but by means of the projecting ornaments below, he gained a footing. Luckily the window was open, but so narrow that it was with difficulty he thrust himself through.

He found himself in a high landing-place, which terminated in a flight of dark stairs, down which he passed without a moment's pause, and found himself in an open gallery. At the same time he thought he heard the King's voice, and listening attentively, he distinguished that he was speaking in a low soothing tone, interrupted by sobs, apparently of the person addressed, and then he plainly heard the abominable blandishing voice of Creswold, which sounded like one who was coaxing another into taking poison. Mervyn had no doubt that these speakers composed the group he sought, and following the sound, he reached a sort of gilded balcony, overlooking a small but very beautiful garden, fenced in by high palings, surrounded by a broad moat, overhung by willows, beyond which were the extensive woodlands and park of Clarendon House, or Hyde Park as it has since been denominated.

Immediately below Mervyn's point of sight was a spectacle which enchained his eyes, and filled his heart with grief and indignation. Reclining in a state of insensibility in an arm-chair, in which they seemed to have borne her to the open air, lay the peerless form of Aurora Sydney, her fair hair hanging in dishevelled masses, her dress disordered, and her countenance pale as marble. Charles, Creswold, and a number of gaudily-dressed women stood

about in various attitudes, with cordials, burnt feathers, vinegar, and other restoratives.

Mervyn's first impulse was to leap the balcony into the garden below; but suddenly a thought interposed that plucked him back. What right had he to interfere?—and how did he know that his interference would be approved even by the lady herself? All that he had seen might be but a farce, a resistance meant only to increase the violence of the passion it opposed. He stood fixed, and in a moment took a new resolution, which was to ascertain Aurora's real motives and intentions before he took upon him the Quixotic enterprise of rescuing her.

"Nonsense, Chitty! what folly is this, chicken?" said Creswold, as the lady, reviving slowly, stared around in the wildest terror, and then with a shriek of utter despair, burst into a passion of tears and sobs. "Ya stand in your own light if ya but knew it. A' should like to know what lady in the land would refuse such a chance an she had it? Lawk-a-mercy! 'tis next to being queen of broad England, and better too, for one's the substance and the other's the shadow. What a to-do about nothing! I should like to know, madam, if you consider yourself better than all the ladies of the court put together? And keep your own secret, and no one will be the wiser. Oh, if you only knew what I know, ya'd see it only takes a little caution to be as virtuous as the best of them, marry come up! But, Master Rowley, I *am* ashamed to see you on your knees like a great bashful boy, when——"

"Tut, dame, what can I do?—she is fretting herself into fits," said Charles. "Dearest Aurora, be not afraid, for on my soul I love you! Marry, what can put the little mouse in such a tremor, seeing that, though her King, I own myself the humblest of her slaves."

"Restore me to my father, sire!" sobbed Aurora. "I will not stay here another moment—I will rather die! Where is my father? I do not love you, I hate you. I will see my father. Oh, you have betrayed me here, wretches, but Sydney will rouse all England to rescue me. You had better let me go, indeed you had! and I will tell no one, I swear I will not! Oh, why—why have you brought me to this horrible place?"

"Horrible place, quotha!" exclaimed Creswold. "Marry, and I should like to see a handsomer or better conducted

'stablishment on this side the water. Horrible place, hear ye ? "

" Peace, hag," said Charles, sharply ; and, changing his tone into one of humble deference, he continued, " Why have I brought you here ? Alas ? dearest creature, need you ask a question which your own heart must sufficiently answer ? Because I love you, dote on you, worship you ; because I value you more than my crown—more than life itself. Yet be not fearful ; I mean you no harm ; your father is in no danger. I swear I would rather die than suffer one hair of that beautiful head to be injured. But I want you to hear me—to hear reason. I know that the traitor Mervyn, far from pleading my cause, for which I bribed the renegade, endeavoured to supplant me——"

" Bribe him ! not with your crown," exclaimed Aurora, turning with flashing eyes upon the monarch. " His honourable soul would have scorned, loathed, despised me below all calculation had he found that I yielded but a hair's breadth of encouragement to your infamous passion, King."

" You are mad, lady," said Charles, darkening with anger. " Deem you that ever a courtier preferred his honour to his interest ? And if he pretended to love you all on the sudden, as I am told he did, it was in the romantic hope of some day wedding the rich and beautiful Duchess of Richmond, which I promised to make you, and do still, on condition that you listen favourably to the suit of a man who is willing to make you even the Queen of England."

" On the sudden, say you on the sudden ? " interrupted Aurora, with vehemence. " He loved me ever from that moment of horror and danger in which we met for the first time. Which among you ventured his life to save mine but he alone at that dreadful feast at Windsor ? And hear me, sir, hear me, and, if you have a man's heart, release me on the instant. I tell you I love him too, and I will die as many deaths as cruelty can devise ere I will be false to him in the poor particular of but one smile that should be his."

" Rantatara ! who ever heard such a jubilate ? " cried Mrs. Creswold. " Marry, an' it were me I would soon bring her down from her high flights. A'd teach her to come to the whistle."

Charles seemed to pause, as if making an effort to control his wrath, but there was one within hearing to whom every

word of that passionate outburst was sweeter than the most eloquent music.

"Madam," said Charles, in a tone of forced calm, "I am obliged to you for making me so unreservedly your confidant. I shall know what toad to crush that mars my strawberries. You say you love this shoe-tie of mine, this skipjack of my court, Mervyn? I seek your advancement, do you seek his? On your resolution depends even his life! This is no age of scruple-weighing justice; and you may remember that he lent a helping-hand in Godfrey's murder. Refuse me, and I will bring his head to the block, as surely as ever your father and his friends brought those of mine; —accept me, and I will make him your husband, with a dukedom for your dowry."

There was a pause after this extraordinary proposal—a pause of deep and unbroken silence for nearly a minute, and Mervyn's eyes were fixed on Aurora in intense expectation. Charles was standing in an attitude of earnest entreaty, but the look and manner of Aurora, the overwhelming scorn and indignation which illuminated her beauty with a kind of celestial fierceness and scorn, the curved lips, the beautiful nostrils instinct with contempt, presented an appearance which was sublime in its passion and beauty.

"For whom do you take me and him, King?" she said at last, in a tone of withering scorn. "Are you a man, and dare you think that a man could be so base as to accept such fathomless infamy? Hark you, sir!—sooner than be the thing you would make me, I would cheerfully share all that poverty hath of contempt and bitterness, as the wedded wife of the man I loved, though he were the poorest beggar that ever looked up to the sun to curse its light in the desperation of his misery."

"More fool you, child; ya'd a-find hard crusts break a body's teeth," said Creswold, sneeringly.

"You then reject my offer, which I will never repeat," said Charles, with gloomy solemnity. "Mark me, girl! you are no longer coquetting with the good-humoured careless King, the Merry Monarch, as they call me in Whitefriars! A change has come over my nature—your faction has at last made me the tyrant they have so long represented me. The Stuart blood in my veins, which was wont to flow so lithesomely, is thickening into a fluid as black as Nero's! I swear to you I will have your lover's

head, and the heads of half England, if you dare prefer any one to me."

"I have but one answer for you, sire," replied Aurora, in a less excited tone. "I am Sydney's daughter, and I will die rather than dishonour his name. In mercy's name, do not drive me to that pass."

"Well, well, don't make such a potherum," interposed Mrs. Creswold; "different people have different tastes; but if so be I was his Majesty—well, you quality people don't like to give things their proper names—but I'd soon see how long I'd stand listening to a frothy roundhead oration from the daughter of one of my father's cut-throats. I should like to know what mercy Colonel Sydney showed to his martyred Majesty of blessed memory, when he voted his head off his shoulders."

"Leave us, Mrs. Creswold," said Charles, striding hastily up and down the grass-plot, like a man that is forming his resolution with difficulty. "I am resolved—I have determined—you *shall* hear reason, Mistress Sydney. You are wholly in my power. Creswold, take your women and yourself away, while I strive to reason this pretty piece of obduracy into common sense."

"There's old Rowley again!—as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb," said the beldame, with great glee, and making a signal to the women, they all trooped off to the house; but Aurora sprang after them, and seizing Mrs. Creswold by her bunchy sacque, she exclaimed, in a voice of the wildest consternation, "You shall not leave me alone with this wicked man; I will go with you. Oh, do not, do not leave me, dear, dear Mrs. Creswold!"

"Nonsense, child, you are a little simpleton, and don't know your own luck," said Creswold, blandishingly. "Come come; you rumple my good new sacque with your clutching—take her off, Master Rowley, and away with me, wenches."

But Aurora clung with frantic energy to the old woman, and even flung her arms round her neck, shrieking and imploring compassion; and Charles, irritated by her resistance, tore her away in his arms with violence, and smothered her cries with his licentious kisses.

In her distraction, Aurora called on her father and on Heaven alternately, and at last on Mervyn. Whether it was that she caught a glimpse of him, or merely from the instinct of despair—but as she pronounced the name it

seemed as if it was a spell to bring him from the earth, for he was by her side with the rapidity of lightning. In an instant Charles's embrace was wrenched off, with a violence to which his royalty was but little accustomed, and Aurora was clutched to Mervyn's breast with all the energy of love and desperation.

Creswold and the women, as well as Charles himself, stood for a moment as if petrified by the suddenness of the apparition.

"Villain! what means this insolence?" said Charles at last, staring amazedly at the fierce countenance of the youth before him, no longer a submissive courtier, but an exasperated rival.

"It means that your Majesty is but a man, and I am but another," replied Mervyn; "and with this advantage, that I am honest, and you are a villain and a tyrant; and if you doubt my word, advance but one foot farther to harm this fair innocent, and try if your royal skin be adamant against my poniard."

"And are you, sir, the new Don Quixote to repair wrongs?" said Charles, furiously. "If so, unsheathe that iron, which methinks you keep something carefully in the scabbard. Ha, traitor! do you draw on the King?"

And with a rapidity which, under the circumstances, was treacherous, Charles drew his rapier, and made so sudden a pass at Mervyn that he had only time to strike it aside from his breast by catching it in the fleshy part of his arm, which it pierced with a sensation of exquisite pain. Charles withdrew the blade instantly, intending to strike again at his heart, but Mervyn closed with him, shaking off Aurora, who fell shrieking between them. He managed to seize the rapier by the hilt, and twisting it from Charles's grasp, dashed him staggering to some distance, and then stepping over the lady, he stood brandishing the weapon and prepared for mortal combat. But the desperation which glittered in his eye apparently overawed his antagonist, and he stood shaking his fist and yelling with rage. Meanwhile, Creswold shouted, "Help" and "Murder," at the pitch of her dissonant voice, but seemed not to venture any personal interference.

"Mervyn, Mervyn—oh, save me! let us fly this way—this way!" exclaimed Aurora, as her valorous defender raised her. She was evidently frantic with alarm, and

dragged his arm and pointed to the portal. But a new apparition suddenly prohibited that exit;—two powerful ruffians, or swashbucklers, as they were technically called, with drawn swords and round shields, made their appearance, urged on by Chiffinch, who, however, kept becomingly in the rear.

"Cut down the cully, he plays at false dice!" yelled Creswold, pointing at Mervyn. "Cut him down—you have the King's warrant—cut him down."

"No, no; take the girl from him, and kick him out of window," said Charles; "or rather keep him prisoner in an outhouse, till I have time to adjudge him something worthier of his merits."

The ruffians made a few steps forward, but they seemed to hesitate.

"Release me, dearest Mistress Sydney!" said Mervyn, calmly but desperately; "release me while I deal with these people—if I fall I die happy, since it is for you."

"We will die together," replied Aurora wildly; "I could not survive you—let us die together. But surely something human must be within hearing. Help, murder, help!" and she shrieked at the highest pitch of her voice.

"Come, my master, you had better go quietly, instead of having your throat cut," said the foremost ruffian. "Release the girl and go about your business, if that's all it's about, mother?"

"Curse you, cut his throat!" yelled Creswold. "What do you mean, you villain!—to let him bring the mob down upon us?"

"Make way, scoundrels!" said Mervyn, grasping the hand of Mistress Sydney, and resolutely throwing himself forward, rapier in hand; the ruffians rushed upon him, and their blades met with a clash. Charles shouted to his myrmidons to take care of the lady, who, however, endeavoured to rush between the combatants, and although her effort embarrassed Mervyn, it also made the ruffians afraid to strike at him. The combat did nevertheless necessarily become closer, and perfect master as Mervyn was of his weapon, it could not long have remained doubtful against such odds, especially as Charles aided his allies by seizing Aurora, and endeavouring to force her away—when suddenly a shout was heard. "*Morbleu!* what sort of a charivari is this?" and a stranger rushed in half-dressed,

in doublet and hose hastily thrown on, his sword drawn, and struggling with a mob of women, who endeavoured to hold him back.

"*Vie du roi!* what is this?" exclaimed the stranger, and the next moment he seemed to have explained matters to his own satisfaction, for he rushed forward and ranged himself on Mervyn's side by dealing a blow at one of the ruffians, which sent him reeling over chairs and flower-pots on the grass. Thus reinforced, Mervyn pressed on the other, and although he was a good swordsman, proved his own superiority by laying him at his feet severely wounded.

"*Peste!* but that was well pushed into the Flander's scum!" exclaimed the stranger, turning on Chiffinch; but he fled instantly, and so fast that it was hopeless to think of overtaking him. "And now, sir," he continued, "follow me, if you do not know the windings of this Paradise, for we shall soon have a whole nest of hornets about our ears. How the fiend have you raised such a riot in this virtuous establishment? A wench? Ay, always a woman or a priest in this world's trouble. But I could be sorry to see you here, Master Mervyn."

"Claude Duval!" exclaimed the young captain, in great astonishment.

"Even no worse a man," said Claude.

"This is a most virtuous lady, and of high rank, falsely beguiled to this den of infamy. Help me to save her, Claude," said Mervyn, hurriedly, and soothing Aurora, who now hung faint and exhausted on his arm.

"Claude Duval, I am the King," said Charles, advancing, evidently absorbed in rage. "I am the King, and I promise you your pardon and a fair domain beside if you will help me to seize this traitor to his King and all faith."

"You are the King! Hilloa, Master Rowley, do you recollect what we promised each other when last we met?" said Duval: "that if you caught me I should hang, and if I caught you, you should deliver; so, sire, your purse or your life!" and cocking a pistol, he stood with it levelled at the King's head. Charles affected mute scorn, but it would not do, and finding that the stranger was in earnest, he sullenly resigned his purse.

"Take it back, you need it more than I do," said Claude, with a bitter smile; "but you see I am a man of my word.

Come, now, Master Mervyn, this way, this way. *Chère mademoiselle,* in the name of all sweet essences, whereof I have none, do not faint."

"No, no, no; let us leave this horrible place," said Aurora. "I shall be quite well as soon as we are out of sight of yonder dreadful man."

"You sha'n't take her—you sha'n't take her! she is a niece of mine, confided to my protection," yelled Creswold. "I'll send the peace officers after you; villains, how dare ya abduct my child?"

"Peace, mother, let them go, since we may not at present help ourselves," said Charles, throwing himself into the chair, with a loud laugh. "Farewell, master bastard; you shall understand anon what it is to have a king for an enemy."

But long ere this denunciation concluded, the denounced, under the guidance of Duval, was almost out of hearing. They crossed the garden to the opposite palings, and Claude, lifting a mass of ivy, showed them a latched postern, which, opening, disclosed a little rural bridge over the moat. They crossed this hurriedly, and found themselves in the artificial wild forming part of the Mulberry Gardens.

"Now you are safe, lady," said Duval, pausing. "I dare not accompany you farther. Keep ever to the left, Master Mervyn, and you will soon be at the canal."

"Whoever and whatever you are, come with us—come to my father! Oh, he will thank you, for I am bewildered!" said Aurora.

"It may not be—not now, at least, lady," said Duval, with a courteous smile. "I owed you a fair turn for the honour which you once deigned me of dancing a minuet on Hounslow Heath, for are you not beautiful Mistress Aurora Sydney? But there is no time to be lost; haste hence, Master Mervyn, and Heaven bless you both; you are your father's true son."

"But, Claude, I have a thousand things to say to you; tell me, at least, where I can find you again!" exclaimed Mervyn.

"I will see you again shortly, dear Master Mervyn," replied Duval, "for I, too, have something to say; but now farewell, we shall be observed."

"Ah, he is wounded!" exclaimed Aurora, for she now

perceived the thick drops falling through Mervyn's sleeve, as he supported her round the waist.

"'Tis only a scratch, dearest lady!" said Mervyn, tenderly; but perceiving by his extreme paleness that he was exhausted, Duval advised him to sit down on the cool grass while he procured a sedan. He then ran off, and soon returned with a sedan, in which he saw them securely stowed, and told the porters to go to Sydney Place, and then set off himself in another direction, at a rate which showed he was not without apprehensions for his own safety.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE ALCHEMIST

Mervyn remarked, with some degree of alarm, that the route which his porters took must necessarily lead them past the front of Creswold's house, and he had hardly time to warn his fair companion before they found their sedan involved in a crowd assembled at the very spot. The bearers, after a short struggle with the pressure, sat down on their poles, so that although he kept himself very firmly ensconced hitherto, Mervyn looked out to see what was the matter. It was now getting dark, but there was a great blaze of torches round the door, and the first object that Mervyn discerned was Colonel Sydney, thundering at the knocker as if to beat the door down. Several gentlemen with their swords drawn, among whom Mervyn recognised Lords Russell and Howard and some of Sydney's servants with staves, were around him.

Concluding instantly that he had traced his daughter's abductors by some means to this house, and that in all probability he would raise a riot which might make the adventure public, Mervyn whispered Aurora to remain where she was and sprang out. Buffeting his way with some difficulty to the colonel, he arrested his arm at the very height of a third peal, which seemed to shake the building to its foundations. "Colonel Sydney, she is not there; she is in safety," he exclaimed.

"Who are you—who is in safety, sir?" said Sydney,

turning round with the look of a madman. "If you are men, assist me to break this door down; I will abide all the consequences. Russell, Howard, good people, they have inveigled a lady in this horrible house under the most monstrous pretence. Assist me, if you are men and Englishmen. I am Colonel Sydney. I will give any man a hundred guineas who bursts me open this foul portal." And he dashed a massive stone at the oaken panels, which was followed by another from Russell.

"If you haf lost your monies there, you had better not lose your time too," said a Jewish voice from the mob; and there was a general laugh.

"Colonel Sydney, I assure you on my life she is safe yonder," exclaimed Mervyn.

"Safe! where?" said Sydney, wildly. "Who are you that assure me so? What, Captain Mervyn! Villain, coward, where is my child? Restore her to me ere I wring that craven heart from thy breast."

And he seized Mervyn by the throat with a force that nearly strangled him; then dashing him away, he raised his sword, probably expecting him to draw too—but overcome by pain, loss of blood, and this last galling insult, Mervyn fell against the gnarled root of a tree, and with such violence that he lay insensible and bleeding. A piercing shriek from the sedan announced that some one there took an interest in this extraordinary scene; and recognising the voice, Sydney rushed to it, followed by his friends. His daughter sprang into his arms, and fainted there.

"Take her home, colonel—she must not be made a ballad of!" exclaimed Lord Russell, and Sydney got into the sedan, with his daughter still insensible in his arms.

Meanwhile the mob lifted Mervyn, with their usual tenderness to one whom they supposed to be the vanquished hero of a combat, and amongst them all the Jew who had formerly interfered, seemed most active. He announced himself a friend of the insensible gentleman, and an apothecary in the neighbourhood, hired some men to carry him, and led the way to his own house, which was at the back of the Mall. It was a dark mean-looking dwelling, and the shop into which he admitted his prize, and the carriers of it, carefully excluding the mob retinue, faithfully resembled Shakespeare's lean apothecary's. It was ornamented with

stuffed lizards, and an Egyptian mummy, which yielded a drug at that time in repute ; two or three rows of phials and metal vessels, labelled in cabalistical characters, forming the stock-in-trade. Beyond this apartment was another which, from the glow of light through many a crack and fissure in the wall, seemed a chemical laboratory ; and this idea was not contradicted by the personal appearance of the owner, who was brown and shrivelled as his mummy, and had the hooked nose and glittering eyes peculiar to the race of Abraham, who at that time were considered the best professors of the chemical art.

The old man led the way into the inner room, in which was a blazing furnace in full operation, and a dark alcove in which was a bed. On this they laid Mervyn, and the old man applied some vinegar to his nostrils, and then washed his luxuriant hair, which hung clotted on his brow. He opened his eyes at last, though without much speculation in them, and the Jew proceeded to examine the wound in his arm, which he probed and bound, observing that it was rather dangerous from the effusion of blood than any other cause. He then prepared some kind of drink, which he invited the patient to swallow, and although Mervyn had many indistinct associations of evil with the extraordinary Hebrew visage before him, he was too languid to form any precise notions on the subjects. A deep sleep shortly after fell upon him, and the porters, satisfied with the remuneration which the Jew selected from the pockets of his patient, took their departure with earnest wishes for his honour's recovery.

How long he slept, Mervyn could not guess, but he was awakened by a murmuring of voices which mingled for some time in his dreamy reverie ere it roused his attention. But the recollection of where he was, and how he came there, returned in strange confusion on his mind ; and it was not until he distinctly heard and remembered one of the voices, that he could form any clear idea even of his own existence. It was the voice of Lady Howard, and, at the sound of it, the circumstances of his position came upon him with extraordinary vividness, and he looked with breathless caution through a little rent in the bed-curtains into the laboratory. It was evidently night, for all was dark save what was illuminated by the flames of a furnace lapping round a brazier which rested on it ; but

the glare fell full upon two persons, one sitting and watching the pan, the other—a female figure wrapped in a long mantle and hood—leaning against the pillar of the furnace. This conjunction of inauspicious stars Mervyn instantly concluded boded no good to him.

"Hush, Elkanah—he may awake and hear us!" said the lady, seeming to interrupt some observation of the Jew's. "I would not for the world he should awake."

"Nor I," replied Elkanah, "nor will he, though an ordnance were fired at his ear, for hours yet, unless the loss of vital energy should have robbed my potion of its effect. I knew not how long it might take me to have your ladyship's commands, so I gave him a draught of which a few drops more would have put him to sleep for ever."

"Would you had, and I should have been spared the hell of this moment!" said Lady Howard, with a deep sigh.

"*Imprimis*, I knew not your pleasure; *in secundis*, I am so well known that I should be arrested for the murder though the body were found in Cheapside," replied Elkanah. "But what ish to be done?—Everything in dish world for money."

"Why, he hath committed high treason—he hath struck the King's sacred Majesty—he deserves death by law—and he must *die*," said the countess, with a deep and melancholy intonation on the last word. "But are you sure he is well asleep, Master Jew?"

"Surely, surely, he hath that would make a horse sleep from sunrise to sunset," said Elkanah, impatiently. "Vell, ash you say, he struck de King—a crime abominable in our law as in your hereshy—vell, can you not have his head chopped off for high treason?"

"No—I am held in a fearful bond not to appear in this matter—or all will be revealed!" replied Lady Howard, hurriedly. "The King dare not accuse him of a crime which covers himself with dishonour; but every crime should have its punishment, either by law or justice, Elkanah!—It may content the nature of his offence, which being secret, its chastisement should be so too. It may satisfy justice, Elkanah, to——"

"To cut his throat in his stupor?" said the Jew, eagerly.

"No, no, no!" replied the countess, with a shudder.

"I meant I will have him seized and sold as a slave in the plantations."

"Are your perquisitions then made, for I will not warrant his slumbers much longer—and if he wakes, he is so fierce, he will resist like a mad lion," replied the Oriental.

"Within the hour they will be here—a slaver now lies in the river, and its captain is a creature of my making," replied the lady. "If you meet any one 'tis but to give out you are a press-gang. What say you?'

"I say 'tis a hazardous tempting of Providence," said Elkanah. "These transports have a trick of returning and telling tales, as he that hanged the merchant of Bristol last year. Take the advice of one who hath seen life—yea, and death too—*dead men tell no tales.*"

There was a long and emphatic pause, the conclusion of which it may be readily believed Mervyn waited with some anxiety.

"Do you think he is so soundly asleep—could I look upon him for a moment?—They say he is very like Au——like *him*, and it would steel my resolution," said the countess, rather to herself than her coadjutor.

"Would you kill him?" said Elkanah, with a low chuckle. "Mark you, I will have no blood shed in my dwelling!—dish is our Hebrew Sabbath, and on dish day—no, not till the rising of to-morrow's sun—shall not any man labour in his vocation under my roof, and therefore doth this pan sputter away for want of a little scumming which I will not give it."

"I would not kill him, Jew—unless mine eyes slay like the basilisk's," replied the lady, in a voice of deep despondency. "But are you sure his wound is not dangerous?"

"If he abstain from wine and strong drinks for one fourteen days, he shall be whole as marble," said the apothecary in a regretful tone, and then he added in another of singularly horrible gaiety—"Yet, madam, it could be made as mortal as a dagger in the net of the heart—he! he! he!—you stare like a stuffed crocodile."

"But—but—without much pain to the unhappy youth?" said the countess, in a faltering tone.

"No gate of death opens without a little creaking on the hinges, lady," replied the mediciner, calmly. "'Tis but dressing the wound with a peculiar ointment, and on

a sudden the blood is tainted into a thick and plague-struck mass—and the man dies."

"I do not bid thee do it, Elkanah—yet I would give a hundred golden crowns to any man who told me it was done," said the countess.

"A hundred crowns!—what, to run such a ghastly risk—to purchase a drug, every ounce of which is worth its weight in gold—delude the searchers with a tale of the spotted fever, and with a bribe—bury him too—all for a hundred crowns? not for King nor Kaiser," exclaimed the Hebrew, vehemently. "No, lady, man may repent of everything but blood, and unless the divine secret of the elixir vitæ, the wondrous faculty of withstanding all the brows of death, were mine——"

"Fool! do not prate to me of the elixir vitæ," interrupted the countess, much agitated. "Let me see this sleeper ere I resolve on anything—yet hath he not challenged Howard? He must needs have discovered something. But, Elkanah, be certain thou art not deceiving me in this matter."

"I swear to you, madam, my lord engaged me as his surgeon, and that was my business in the Mall when these things came to pass," replied the Hebrew; and taking a blazing coal from the fire in a pair of tongs, instead of a lamp, he lighted the countess towards the bed. Mervyn took his cue instantly, and feigned a deep sleep, but when he perceived the light of the flame as it passed over his eyes he felt that the lids quivered, and it seemed that Elkanah observed it, for he withdrew the coal hastily. Then he knew that some one was bending over him intently, and of a sudden he felt a single scalding tear fall on his cheek, and a hand brushed his black ringlets from his brow.

"It is the very image of that unhappy man," she groaned, rather than said, at last. "Oh, Elkanah, what a son were here, to a mother who dared love and acknowledge him. Away! it kindles mine old hatred in my heart, to see how like he is. Well, prepare your ointment for his wound, since it must be."

"I shall need one to assist me in the preparation, for being the Sabbath, I can handle none of these matters myself," said the Jew.

"We will trust no third—I will be your slave for the

nonce—but, hark, what is that?" exclaimed the countess, as a low timid knock was heard at the door.

"Who is that you mean?" said Elkanah, contemptuously smiling. "It is a rich fool of mine, who feeds my necessities, in order that I may discover the great secret of transmuting metals *for him*—ha,! ha!—and so I fool him to my purposes. Step into this closet, and I will soon dismiss him."

The countess seemed to comply, and the apothecary went into his shop, whence he returned with a lean ill-dressed man in a long russet cloak.

"Come in, come in, Master Bethel—you are as the fearful disciple coming in the night," said Elkanah, with a sardonic laugh. "I hope you have brought the fuel?"

"How goes the furnace?" replied the visitor, in a gruff tone.

"Oh, it cannot get on for want of the sublimed particles whereof I spoke to ye," replied Elkanah. "I might have projected perchance but for your delay; but now my mercury is all burned out, and as soon as daylight I must to work preparing a new infusion."

"Thus are you ever with your legends and delays—Jew, you Jew me!" said Bethel, bitterly. "But mark! here are the hundred guineas—they are the last you shall ever drain from me—and if I find you fail me again, I will force your neck into the halter whence I drew it."

"Look to your own, Master Bethel. These are slippery times," replied the Hebrew, snatching the purse very eagerly, which Bethel produced from under his cloak. "Think you that the *arcanum arcanorum*—the mightiest secret of nature—is to be obtained by threats and imprecations, or by humble, patient, and laborious struggles with the powers that strive to conceal it? Come hither, unenlightened! behold what I have done! Look how nigh to the celestial projection!"

And he exposed to the sheriff's dazzled eyes some particles of diamond-dust glittering on a heap of lead, which he had probably prepared to deceive his dupe. Bethel surveyed the glittering bait with intense curiosity; but not satisfied with this display, the alchemist led him to his furnace, and opening the lid of the brazier, a fine blue flame shone glowingly round, and he began to explain his proceedings, in a jargon which, to Mervyn at least, was unintelligible.

His thoughts, however, were occupied on some other matter than divining the meaning of the adept's observations, if any there was; the absorbing topic in his imagination was, how to escape the horrible destiny in reserve for him. The sole chance which he could discern was to make off, *vi et armis*; but as he had considerable apprehension that Bethel would side with his Jewish friend, and as he was armed with pistols, he thought it best to wait his departure. Meanwhile he glanced cautiously round the chamber for his own arms, and perceived his sword on the edge of the furnace, quite out of the reach even of hope. The inexplicable revelations to which he had listened had convinced him, however, of the extreme desperation of the circumstances in which he stood.

All Blood's hints had now acquired certainty in his mind; though it still seemed almost incredible, he could no longer doubt but that he was the offspring of an illicit connection between the colonel and the cruel woman before him, whose resolution to be rid of the evidence of her shame stopped not even at murder! As Lady Howard was an Aumerle too, his resemblance to that family was no longer surprising.

"Ah! it is your greediness, Bethel!" were the next words of the Jew in which Mervyn understood a meaning. "*Ars longa, vita brevis est*—the elixir vitæ is a necessary preliminary of the mere search after the philosophers' stone! It is the shortness of the life of man alone which baffles his researches and the godlike penetration of his intellect, and *that* they designed above when they made us the poor fools and stalking shadows of time. What would it avail, master, to obtain the secret of transmuting gold to last but a few short years, and then to the great bar, to render a slavish account of what we have done? But the tree of life still bears its everlasting fruit, and cursed be the folly of the first of a foolish sex that plucked the apple of knowledge when that of immortality was within her reach! This evil must be remedied ere man can aspire to be in wisdom as a god; and if I live long enough, I doubt not, Master Bethel—I doubt not *we* shall both live for ever."

At this moment a loud knocking was heard at the apothecary's door, which interrupted this brilliant exposition.

"What is that?—villain, do you design aught against me?" exclaimed Bethel, shaking as if in an ague, but laying his hand on a pistol in his belt.

"Not a hair of your head shall be hurt, master! Curse them, they come too soon, and will cheat me of half my harvest!" muttered the Jew. "Go in and hide, Master Bethel, and tell the woman within that she will be agreeably disappointed."

He pushed Bethel into the closet, and made a hasty exit as if to answer the repeated stroke at the door. Mervyn instantly, not without a vague hope that he might find an ally in the new-comer, sprang out of bed, possessed himself of his sword and roquelaure, and followed on tiptoe into the shop. But the first object he saw there effectually destroyed his hopes. It was Chiffinch, at the head of a file of musketeers, whispering earnestly with the Jew! Some of the soldiers perceived him instantly, and levelled their carbines at him. Chiffinch turned, with a terrified exclamation, and ran behind the soldiers, shouting, "Seize him—seize him—this is the traitor!"

"Surrender, my master—resistance is of no avail," said Elkanah, suddenly clutching him by the belt; but Mervyn smote him instantly to the ground, with a blow which marked the restoration, however momentary, of all his physical powers.

"Surrender, villain, or I fire!" exclaimed the commander of the troop, raising a pair of pistols.

"On what charge, Sir Philip Lloyd—if I mistake not?" said Mervyn, laying down his sword, and folding his arms quietly.

"On a charge of robbery—stealing the King's jewels," replied Sir Philip. "But you will know more at length in a few minutes—my lord mayor is sitting thus late for the purpose. Come, Master Chiffinch, bring the old man, and shut the house after us."

"Search it first—you will find two notorious ill characters in it, Sir Philip," replied Mervyn, with a bitter smile.

"My warrant extends no further," replied the officer; and he escorted his prisoner to a coach which was waiting outside, into which they got without delay, and drove off at a rapid rate towards the city. And thus was Mervyn freed from one most imminent peril only to fall into another still more terrible. But he was somewhat comforted by the amazing nature of the accusation, which he felt it was utterly impossible to substantiate in the slightest degree against him.

It was, nevertheless, with many appalling recollections of his former appearance on the same arena, that he entered Guildhall, still escorted by his guide. Mervyn could not help thinking that the scene was to be of a similar nature, and the bitter consciousness of how little the justice of his cause had formerly availed him struck him like an assurance of evil. The royalist lord mayor was in the chair, and there were very few persons besides in the court; but Cornish, in his character of alderman, was on the bench.

Thus placed at the bar, Mervyn waited for some minutes, during which no one spoke, and then impatiently inquired the nature of the charge against him. As he did so, a door suddenly swung open, and an unexpected set of persons made their appearance. Colonel Sydney, Lord Russell, Howard, and the Duke of Monmouth entered *en masse*, made their way to the bar, and in a moment, considerably to Mervyn's surprise, he was overwhelmed with embraces and shakings of the hand from all four, but above all from Colonel Sydney.

"This is no time for apologies, gallant youth," said Sydney, much moved. "But I do hereby humbly and publicly beg your pardon for the rash insult which, in the madness of passion, I offered you. I do acknowledge, sir, that I owe you more than my life—I owe you mine honour. We have sought you all last night and to-day, and as soon as we heard the false and villanous proclamation against you, with the more diligence, that you might overwhelm the tyrant and his minions with confusion. As it is, I offer bail to any amount, my lord mayor, and so will these gentlemen."

"We must hear the charge ere we know if it be of a bailable nature," replied the magistrate. "This is not the first time, we understand, that the prisoner has stood at a bar of justice; and here comes his Majesty's solicitor and the witnesses."

As he spoke, Elkanah entered the court, his head bound in a bloody cloth, leaning partly on a staff, and partly on the arm of a gentleman of the long robe. This personage immediately attracted Mervyn's attention. He was a tall, strong-boned figure, with a face that seemed as if made of cast-iron, so sternly was every muscle and every line carved. His large nose, bushy eyebrows, regularly arched, his bloated lips, and keen bloodhound-like eye, his narrow,

high, and wrinkled forehead, informed Mervyn he beheld the most dreaded of the court bandogs, Sir George Jeffreys, afterwards the redoubtable lord chancellor.

Mervyn felt, indeed, an indistinct impression of alarm when he found that this worthy was to direct the proceedings against him; but supported by the host of powerful friends who seemed to have rallied round him, he renewed his demand to hear the charge against him.

"Ay, ay, you shall hear enough of that, my master, before we have done with you," said Jeffreys, bustling up. "My lord, this is the impudentest rogue living; he robs me his royal master, and beats us a poor old man because he would not aid and abet him, and comes here to ask what charge have we, forsooth!"

"Well, sir, what charge have you to make, if you are the chargemaker?" said Mervyn, contemptuously. "And look that you keep on this side decency, or your long robe shall scarcely save you from a rough contact with the point of a gentleman's boot."

"Look ye, a gentleman! master jackanapes' bastard turned gentleman," exclaimed Jeffreys, in his taunting manner. "Officers, keep a good look out, for he glares as fierce as a cat in dudgeon. Marry, these are precious times too, when the King's advocates are to be insulted by every offscum, and in such a worshipful presence."

"You shall not be insulted, Mr. Serjeant. I am here to do justice. No man shall say a word against the King's advocates," said the lord mayor, bristling fiercely up. "But state your charge, sir—what is the King's charge? His Majesty shall have justice done him here, at all events."

"It may chance that I shall meet you some day where justice is less impartially administered, so have a care, Sir George," said Mervyn.

"I trust it shall not be till the day of judgment, then, for I hope to see many rogues swing for a less offence than yours," retorted Jeffreys. "And now, my lord, to explain the horridest felony that ever was, and which deserves the rope for three as good reasons as ever went with a man to Tyburn; and I confess I am ashamed to see gentlemen of such quality taking up such a cause. The prisoner here being a poor beggarly upstart, for some reason of his Majesty's generosity, and his horse running away with him towards the enemy, which begat him some reputation for courage, I

say this gentleman thief of ours is made captain of his Majesty's gentlemen-at-arms, to the prejudice of many worthy men; and he would have been knighted had not his mother forgot to give him a name. But set a beggar on horseback—your lordship knows the proverb. No sooner is he with his foot in the stirrup, in full career of fortune, than, lo and behold, the thief's blood in him gets the better of his patent gentility, and divers articles of jewellery and plate at various times disappear; but of course no one suspects my gentleman, though his reputed father was no less a person than that famous jewel stealer, Colonel Blood. Moreover, he keeps up a secret correspondence with his Majesty's enemies—I mean the Shaftesbury gang, my lord, which methinks are much more bitter than all the French in the world—and takes to spreading scandalous lies about the King and the duke, in the factious way, among coffee-houses and brandy stews. His Majesty, thereof credibly informed, thinks proper to dismiss him, and away bolts my lord ere the news was known to Master Chiffinch here, and begs from him the key of the royal jewels under pretence of orders from the King, and that same night divers gems of priceless value are missing. Here were case enough, methinks, to hang any rogue in a Christian country——"

"It is an infamous conspiracy!" interrupted Mervyn, mad with rage.

"Hush, sir! we cannot permit you to interrupt Mr. Serjeant," said the lord mayor. "You shall be heard in your turn provided you say nothing disrespectful of his Majesty."

"'Slife! my lord, we have proof enough," said Jeffreys, triumphantly. "Master Chiffinch, describe what jewels you do clearly know to have been stolen from his Majesty's casket, for methinks you have their custody?"

"My lord, I—I can only say," said Chiffinch, who trembled very much, "I can only say, that I missed at various times various things, but on the night of Master Mervyn's departure the famous Portugal sword set with rubies, which his Majesty had with the Queen, and a diamond aigrette for the hat——"

"The Portugal sword!" exclaimed Sydney.

"Monstrous calumniator!" shouted Mervyn. "When and where was I dismissed? Rogue! I dismissed myself

when I saved a noble lady from your master's brutal violence."

"See you, my lord, the marvellous impudence of this fellow?" yelled Jeffreys. "He hath trumped up a lie as big as Atlas against the King's Majesty to excuse himself; but you shall see."

"Nay, it is true, I swear," said Sydney, vehemently; "it is true, my lord. The insulted lady is my daughter, and this gallant young gentleman did most truly save her, at the peril of his own life."

"I have nothing to do with the follies of heedless young women endeavouring to entrap their kings," said Jeffreys, laughing sardonically. "My lord, hear our proofs, and then decide on the credence due to these factious gentlemen; they will swear for one another like regular affidavit men. They are of the Spaniard's opinion, that if a lie will hold good but for half an hour 'tis worth telling. My lord, we shall prove that this good young innocent traitor did actually offer the stolen jewels for sale to this poor old gentleman here—an honest apothecary somewhere in Barbican—but who occasionally deals in precious stones, like most of his persecuted tribe. Master Elkanah, tell my lord how you became possessed of this *bijouterie*." And he held up a jewelled sword and aigrette. Sydney took and examined them with nice attention.

"My lord, please you, my lord," began the Jew, turning of a leaden colour with hatred and fear, "I am a poor Israelite, something esteemed for my skill in herbs, and I may say, too, something for my judgment of such glittering baubles as these. I was in my shop yesterday, when Master Mervyn was brought in, badly hurt by a gentleman whose daughter he had seduced, and I bound his wounds and tended him even as mine own child, so that whether for gratitude or to ruin me, I know not, but he produced these jewels and offered to sell me them for sixty gold marks. Knowing them instantly to be of his Majesty's jewellery, I grew appalled, and begged him to restore them privately, or else I would inform of him; whereupon we had some words, and he beat me, and might perchance have murdered me, but of the sudden comes up Master Chiffinch and the officers to arrest him, and——"

"It is enough, quite enough to hang fifty such monstrous rogues!" exclaimed the magistrate. "Away with him

to Newgate; make out his committal—a pestilent rogue and murderer!"

"My lord, this man is totally unworthy of credit," said Lord Russell, eagerly. "Before you send this honourable young man to a dungeon on his evidence, I demand to ask a question or two of him. Tell me, Jew, were you never at a bar on a trial for your life?"

"Never!" said Elkanah, solemnly, clasping his withered hands.

"On your oath, old man?" continued Russell; and the Jew looked at him with keen rat-like suspicion, but shook his head negatively.

"Then, my lord, he is perjured," said the Lord Russell; "I was myself foreman of the grand jury when a true bill was returned against him for poisoning an ancient woman at the instigation of her heir; and he but escaped the rope by a flaw in the indictment, which all men thought was contrived."

"Ay, indeed, say you so, my Lord Russell?" said the mayor, looking in a puzzled manner at Jeffreys; and the old Hebrew turned to a deadly yellow whiteness.

"These base panders have but contrived this plot to gratify the King's hatred!" exclaimed Sydney.

"You are woefully deceived, my dear sir," said Jeffreys, smoothly. "My lord, I am sorry to say this much, but it is in my instructions—the truth is, this unhappy rogue had seduced a lady, who shall be nameless—had inveigled her into a house of questionable reputation up by the Mall, and being detected by the father, he invents the horridest lie that ever was against the King, because, forsooth, his Majesty being of a gay turn, as we all know, God bless him! chanced to be in the same street at the same moment."

"Atrocious villain, you lie! and the King, your master, too, if he says so," exclaimed Sydney. "But since you put me on it, the whole world shall know your black treason. My lord, these gentlemen are evidence."

"I do not bear his Majesty's commission to hear him abused," interrupted the lord mayor. "And let me tell you, Colonel Sydney, you do your daughter no good, if she be the lady, to bandy her name thus in men's mouths."

"But, brother, we are bound to hear him if he would be examined as a witness; we have all heard rumours enough about the King and Mistress Sydney, and the colonel's

prudence commended in withdrawing her from court," said Cornish, eagerly interposing. "Come, Mr. Sydney, you shall be heard."

"But first let me inquire when these jewels were said to have been stolen?" said Sydney, with extraordinary emotion. "When were they missed?"

"Last night," said Chiffinch, eagerly.

"Last night—you are positive?".

"I am on my oath, and I am most positive," said Chiffinch, with some degree of anxiety.

"Then this witness, too, is perjured, my lord," said Sydney, triumphantly. "I swear that I saw this sword at the King's jeweller's, in the Haymarket, this morning, and Master Chiffinch came in and fetched it away while I was there, in the back shop, settling some money matters for my Lord Howard."

"This is amazing! have you any witnesses, colonel?" said Cornish.

"The Duke of Monmouth and my Lord Russell were there at the same time," replied Sydney.

"And particularly noted the sword," said Howard; "for I remember my Lord Russell telling me of it, and saying that Tangier and a trumpery sword were poor pay for receiving popery into the very heart of our councils."

"This is strange, very strange, Mr. Serjeant!" said the lord mayor, looking still more bewildered.

"Give us but time, my lord, and we will produce more witnesses, to knock down this tale of a cock and a bull," said Jeffreys, somewhat lowered in tone and manner.

"No, my lord, with such clear proof of the prisoner's innocence—whoever may be guilty—it is in law and justice to discharge him instantly," said Lord Russell.

"Ha, my Lord Russell, do you come here to teach us the law?" said Jeffreys, insolently. "Marry, this is no factious House of Commons, no mob meeting on Wapping Moor; your word is not law here."

"Nor no man's, as I hope, in any part of England!" said Sydney, vehemently. "And now, my lord, to explain the matter whereof I spoke."

"Sir, I have his Majesty's instruction publicly to acknowledge the perfect honour and spotless reputation of Mistress Sydney so far as *he* is concerned," interrupted Jeffreys.

"I will hear nothing irrelevant to the case," said the lord

mayor, in a vexed tone. "I am, nevertheless, willing to take bail in two sureties of a thousand guineas each."

"I see very well how it is—the King shall have no justice, not even from a loyal subject!" said Sir George, snatching up the jewels in a passion. "And I will go and tell him so."

And he walked hurriedly out of the court, followed by Chiffinch and the old man. Bail was immediately tendered by Sydney and Lord Russell, accepted, and arm in arm with the two latter, Mervyn left that hall for Sydney Place.

CHAPTER L

LOVE, PHILOSOPHY, AND PLOTS

Mervyn was now regularly installed in Colonel Sydney's house as a guest, and as his wound confined him within, he was almost continually in the society of the colonel and his lovely daughter. Nothing could equal the tenderness, the assiduity, the enchanting vivacity of this beautiful nurse, and painful as his wound frequently was, Mervyn ever after looked back on this period of his life as a sort of reverie in Paradise, a delicious dream of perfect happiness. And who that has ever loved, and recollects the springtide of passion, when the myriad hopes and fears, and joys and griefs, which love blossoms forth in such wild profusion, are in full bud and glow and fragrance in his soul, but must deem him then indeed most happy?

It was not that he had dared again to breathe his passion, and had wrung an absolute assurance of its return; a tacit but exquisitely sweet understanding did nevertheless exist between the lovers, and a pledge of faith and mutual confidence was exchanged without the aid of words. By some strange logic of passion, Mervyn persuaded himself that he thus avoided any violation of the large and unbounded trust which Sydney put in him; while the colonel was so absorbed in profound speculations, and in the whirl of stormy politics into which his party had plunged, that the subtle smiles, the casual blush, the half-checked sigh, the mute language of the eye in which love pours its tenderest tale, passed unnoticed before his pre-engaged senses. More-

over, all republican as he was, the vast difference of rank between a nameless orphan and a daughter of his almost royal race seemed to make so vital a difference between them, as to render a mutual passion as improbable as that of a frog for a star.

Meantime, Mervyn was not without his little jealousies, even in this height of happiness and of credulous faith in the future. Monmouth haunted Mistress Sydney as constant as her shadow; Howard was a perpetual visitor, and under the guise of friendship Mervyn perceived that he nourished a strong passion for the beautiful Aurora. Meanwhile it was obvious that her chief care and delight were in pleasing Mervyn; on him she lavished all the charms of her vivacity, her roseate smiles, her many and brilliant talents. She sang, she played, she rattled away with a perpetual gaiety and good humour, which seemed to have an inexhaustible source in her young and ardent soul.

Sydney's house was at that time the rendezvous of almost all the chief personages of the popular party, except Shaftesbury, who, though he continued an active correspondence with all, was at the time under a sort of concealment, few knew precisely where. Mervyn was of course introduced to the party as a new but zealous partisan, from whose great talents and wrongs much might be expected; and an unreserved confidence took place between himself and Sydney. His revelations on the popish plot evidently much surprised the latter; but as he already distrusted the intriguing character and measureless ambition of Shaftesbury, and had always held aloof from his more intricate combinations, it only increased the feeling of aversion with which his upright and unbending nature regarded such Machiavellian manœuvres.

Sydney was at that time engaged in completing his fatal Treatise on Government, and he took delight in expounding his grand reveries to his young convert, and in removing one by one the deeply ingrained prejudices of his monastic education. The serene wisdom, the godlike benevolence, the grandeur, often visionary as it might be, of his speculations, his manly and poetic eloquence, infused his theories irresistibly into a mind so vehement and prepared for the sparks as Mervyn's.

In truth, those grand visions of the perfectibility of man, his natural equality, the nobility of his destinies, which in

practice are perhaps only sublime impossibilities, became life-like existing realities on the eloquent tongue of the sage. Sydney had drunk at the same fountains whence the antique mind of Milton had drained inspiration, and although in his writings he used a perfect and even bare simplicity, confiding in the native strength of his reasonings alone, there were times when he poured forth torrents of eloquence, which wanted not scanning to become the most magnificent poetry.

Aurora's admiration of her father was enthusiastic, and she took his principles without examination, as truths of Holy Writ. But, though she troubled herself but little with reasons for the faith that was in her, still her eloquent echoings, her flashing eye, the beautiful colour which glowed on her cheek when she listened to his fiery invectives, produced more effect on Mervyn than any syllogism which Aristotle could have clamped with his iron logic.

Sydney's system was a noble Saxon version of that which in all ages has been the sublime reverie of the greatest and most philosophic minds—which Plato mused—and the most illustrious perhaps of men, certainly of kings, the great Alfred, attempted to put in practice. With a mind naturally susceptible of all that is grand, generous, and vast—in short, poetic—Sydney had still a perfect appreciation of the actual state of things, and it is the attempt to conciliate his noble theory with the workings of a practical experience in men's passions and motives, which constitutes the great value of his treatise. He has accordingly left behind him a work, the logic of which, like the stones of a pyramid, is wedged together beyond the power of men to sever. His great knowledge of history and men, his personal experience of the effects of almost every system of government, furnished him with an inexhaustible mine of comparison and argument. Sydney shrank from none of the consequences of his system, and Mervyn, with the secret hopes and aspirings lurking in his breast, embraced with enthusiasm doctrines which flattered them as it were with delicious music.

But time—inexorable time—wore on, and as Mervyn's convalescence no longer afforded him a pretext, he began to feel that his longer delay in Sydney's house was growing strange, and even improper. Still he could not prevail on himself to break the exquisite fascination which hung over him, and every night he formed a resolution which he broke

every morning. Besides, what was he to do? The world was all before him, but he had apparently little to choose. Sydney took a warm interest in his behalf, and a variety of plans were continually passing in review in their conversations, which produced no result. Sometimes Mervyn talked of going on the Continent, and offering his sword to one of the warring powers—the French—the Dutch—the Germans—the Turks even; but a tearful glance from Aurora, or a smile of saucy incredulity on her sweet lips, quite overset these warlike determinations. Moreover, Sydney would not hear of his leaving England, and hinted mysteriously that the time was coming when the strength of his conversion to the cause of freedom would be put to the test. In fact, the arbitrary policy of the court was no longer disguised, and the resolution of the popular party to resist it to the utmost was every day assuming a more determined and menacing aspect. Nothing more was, however, done in the matter of the pretended robbery, but Mervyn guessed rightly that it was only reserved for a favourable time.

In the midst of these cogitations and vague plans something hopeful seemed to present itself. Lord Howard, whose displeasure at Mervyn's favouritism he had with difficulty kept concealed, brought a message from Shaftesbury earnestly desiring to see him. As Sydney made no objection, and Howard intimated that it was to make a proposal which would prove of advantage to his fortunes, Mervyn assented, for he was now almost moneyless, and his proud spirit revolted from accepting the bounty even of the generous Sydney. Accordingly he accompanied Howard in a boat to Wapping, where the earl resided in obscure lodgings, known only to a few of his most attached followers. The reason of this seclusion was his dread of a new arrest, which, now that the court had succeeded in making two of its creatures sheriffs, was not likely to end in an ignoramus jury.

Landing at the stairs, they passed through several low and intricate alleys, and at last arrived before a row of small tenements, each flanked with a little neglected garden, and apparently occupied by persons of a very indigent class. A broad ditch of fœtid water ran beside the road, over which was a row of almshouses, apparently built for the express purpose of enjoying its odours, for the windows ranged all

along it. Several sluttish women lounged about gossiping over the railings, while the men sat smoking at their doors, seemingly unconscious of all that was going on.

Among these dwellings was a little chandler's shop, decorated with a bunch of consumptive candles, a maggotty cheese, a flitch and a half of bacon, and an empty hogshead, once of sugar, but now swarming with wasps. Towards this establishment did Howard direct his steps, and entering the shop, which was scarcely wide enough to admit his companion too, inquired of a round, fat, bristle-bearded man, who was anxiously weighing a slice of butter for a ragged little girl at the counter, if Mr. Ashly were at home. He was answered in the affirmative by a woman who was at hand, and who opened a door, standing aside to allow the visitors narrow room to pass, and, descending two broken stairs, they entered a room paved with red flag, about eight feet square, furnished with a bare oak table and three chairs, where sat the elegant and princely earl, propped up by pillows on a miserable couch, one of his feet wrapped in a blanket, the other wearing an embroidered slipper. He was reading, or trying to read, a book he held in his hand, but at the moment they entered his face was screwed up with pain, and tears actually forced themselves from his eyes. Here was a lesson in ambition. The great conspirator forced to abandon his splendid home and to hide himself without attendants in a hole at Wapping, waiting in pain and anxiety the decision of perplexities which he had all his life been busied in producing.

"Thank God, you have Christian faces, at all events!" exclaimed Shaftesbury, as the woman retired. "Captain Mervyn, give me your hand. I trust now you have learned what faith to put in princes?"

"When I put any, my lord, I shall deserve the betrayal which is certain," replied Mervyn, cordially returning the earl's hearty embrace.

"Your wrongs pledge you sufficiently, if you have any human blood in your veins," said Shaftesbury, with a smile. "Tyrants themselves make the best and most desperate revolutionists. And now, captain, let me ask your pardon for that foolish letter, of which Monmouth reminded me to-day; but I did not know you then, and circumstances justified my regarding you as a friend, and perhaps *employé*, of the Yorkists; for it is the misfortune of men like me,

who have seen too much of mankind, to believe in little that is true and much that is false, because falsehood, like a berouged coquette, counterfeits truth better than she herself appears."

Mervyn assured the earl, with perfect good faith, that he had almost forgotten the circumstance alluded to, and recognised the force of his motives in acting as he did.

"You are a generous fellow, Mervyn, and I read mark and likelihood in your face that first time I saw you with the hell-serpent, Oates," returned Shaftesbury. "But let us talk in French, or these chandlery friends of ours will have a tale for the council's ear. I lack such men as you—men of young hot blood, that will not stand for ever on the brink. My designs have been frustrated by the unhandsome disappointment of Monmouth and Lord Russell, who have withdrawn themselves from their engagements. I had all ready in London, and they were pledged to the same in the country, when behold, they recede! And they tell me they are not in a condition to concur with me at this time. But, God's life! I look upon it as an artificial excuse, and an instance of their intention wholly to desert me. But nathless, my gallant boy, there is such a preparation made in London, that if they be willing to lose the honour of being concurrent with me, I am able to do it myself, and intend speedily, for there are ten thousand brave boys ready to follow me wherever I hold up my finger! But we must begin at the beginning; you must pledge yourself to our cause, for I mean to confide everything to you, as, indeed, I have the consent of my fellows, Sydney into the bargain. I intend you shall be my intermedio with the city—my master of the works. You shall reside in Aldersgate, in my palace, have as much money as you choose, and direct all my manœuvres till we burst out some fine morning, and at night you shall pay your respects to the Lord Protector as general of our cavalry. I think you will make a dashing fellow at some such place as Edgehill, now."

"But at present, my lord, I am at Sydney Place, and ——" began Mervyn, when the earl interrupted him.

"That is another reason in my favour," he said, with a keen and penetrating glance. "Do you know that the world already begins to marvel at your stay there, and after what was insinuated before that deplorable blockhead, the

lord mayor, it concerns the reputation of Mistress Sydney that you should not be seen too much together. All the world, Master Mervyn, is not engaged in writing a treatise on tyranny—or government, is it ?—and people half think there may be some stronger motive than gratitude in your recent exploit of chivalry. Ah ! see now, how he blushes, like a maiden caught kissing by her mother ! Well, sir, I desire not to probe what you may desire to conceal ; but I would remind you that the days of romance are over, and that it is only in a new and bustling world that merit, without birth or wealth to back it, can hope to elevate itself to the level of its aspirations."

" I accept the office, my lord, if Colonel Sydney approves," said Mervyn, hastily.

" Colonel Sydney is not so deep in the matter as to be desperate," replied Shaftesbury, " therefore he disapproves of my plan ; in fact, it is from ignorance that they all hang aloof ; but I, who have spun the great web of my policy, of all their separate passions, interests, and follies, know that it is so mingled with a coarser yarn, that either the whole stuff will be spoiled, or it will turn out a tapestry for Whitehall ! But now you too belong to the desperate genus, Master Mervyn. Do you think Old Rowley has forgiven you ?—Oh, no ! you have not heard the last of your Portugal sword ; and now that there are two Tory sheriffs in, the reign of the ignoramus juries is over. Tell me, do you accept the appointment ? If so, here are my keys, and my major-domo will receive you as his master."

Thus pressed, Mervyn consented, though not without some momentary reluctance.

" And now I will expound to you this excellent plot, into which you must coax these panic-stricken men, or at least on which I must have a definite answer," continued Shaftesbury. " But we are all rather out of spirits, Howard —put your hand up the chimney—'tis my cellar now—and you will find a bottle of rare Valdepenas."

Howard rose very willingly, drew a table, mustered some crystals, and produced a bottle from the receptacle indicated by the earl, where he had put a case to cool, for he pretended that it boiled on the fiery floor. Thus freshened by his favourite beverage, Shaftesbury launched out in all his usual eloquence, and with a brilliancy of illustration and a clearness of exposition, which showed that he at

least was not bewildered by the immense variety of irons which he had in the fire.

Mervyn soon found with amazement that he stood unconsciously on the verge of a revolution, and that all the ground which had seemed so firm was instinct with the volcanic fluid, ready to explode. The influence of Shaftesbury's vehement eloquence was, however, too powerful on an imagination so warm and romantic as Mervyn's; it swept away all that remained of his calmer judgment, and he rose from the interview a desperate partisan, ready to do and dare all.

It was now agreed that a meeting of all the chief persons of the party should be summoned, and that Mervyn should obtain an explicit answer to the proposal of Shaftesbury, that a general insurrection should immediately take place.

Meanwhile he was to try and gain Sydney's concurrence in the scheme, which would entail that of his small but illustrious band of supporters; and all failing, Shaftesbury, Howard, and his immediate partisans were, according to him, strong enough to do without them.

CHAPTER LI

THE RYE HOUSE PLOT

Mervyn returned to Sydney Place in a state of excitement which could not fail to be remarked, and the colonel and his daughter besieged him with inquiries. To the latter he readily accounted, by mentioning Shaftesbury's proposal, and his acceptance; but he saw that Sydney had some inquietude of his own on his mind. He assented, however, with a readiness which secretly hurt Mervyn, to his announcement that he meant to take up his residence immediately in Aldersgate; but it was some comfort that Aurora's eyes filled with tears, and the roses deserted her lovely cheek. The colonel, too, seemed to remark this, for he inquired somewhat sharply what ailed her, and then abruptly asked Mervyn to take a turn with him in the garden, for that he had a communication to make.

When they were at some distance from the house, the

kindness of Sydney's habitual manner seemed to return, and taking the young man's arm,

"I am glad of this matter between you and Shaftesbury, though you must take care you fall not into his mad schemes," he said, "and on an account which, while it makes me smile, somewhat troubles me. Read this epistle," and the colonel handed a paper to Mervyn, addressed to Colonel Sydney, and putting him on his guard respecting a reported attachment between his daughter and Captain Blood.

"It is Chiffinch's handwriting—atrocious villain!" ejaculated Mervyn, colouring very deeply.

"But this absurd report has gained ground elsewhere, my Lord Russell tells me," continued Sydney, "and it behoves me to put an end to it; perhaps I am something late to do so, but my contempt for men's opinions leads me wrong the right way. And yet I feel I am as completely their slave as any other man, by the way in which this foolish rumour affects me."

"You, then, consider such an alliance as one involving disgrace and dishonour, Colonel Sydney?" said Mervyn, impetuously.

"An alliance!—it cannot be that you ever really entertained such an idea," said Sydney, sternly.

"I see now what the systems of philosophers are—words, mere words," said Mervyn, bitterly. "What is there marvellous even if I dared to love your daughter, Colonel Sydney? Am I not a man? Have I not eyes to see beauty, ears to imbibe harmony, a heart to love, and an arm to protect? And is she not a woman, young, beautiful, and every way worthy of the most passionate and pure affection?"

"And have you told her all this fine stuff, Master Mervyn?" replied the colonel, calmly.

"When I brought Mistress Sydney the King's proposals, she knew that I was either the basest slave alive or a half-maddened lover!" said Mervyn, with vehemence.

"This clears up the only cloud that rested on you in my opinion," replied Sydney, evidently struck; "and it reminds me well that, but for your courage, my daughter would not now be worth an honest man's acceptance. Oh, Mervyn, would to God we had destroyed this abominable mass of prejudices and cruel follies, on which the present

structure of society is raised! But how can I wed my daughter to poverty and shame, even if she returned your love?—let but the time come when the great principles for which I have all my life contended are no longer treated as idle dreams—come to me on some well-stricken field of liberty, which establishes the righteous doctrine of the natural equality of men—and I will prefer you as my son to the greatest despot on the face of the earth."

"That field may be struck in a few days," said Mervyn, much mollified by this speech. "Lord Shaftesbury bids me tell you——"

"I will hear no more of Shaftesbury's ravings; nothing is ripe but his own mad rage," interrupted Sydney. "But there comes my daughter. I trust so much in your honour, Mervyn, that I leave you to make your adieux privately; but thenceforth your visits to my house must be to me alone."

And the colonel dived away into another walk, but not without Mervyn perceiving that he was much moved by the conversation which had just passed.

Aurora now approached, and though she affected to gather flowers by the way, she looked very melancholy, and it was evident she had been weeping. Mervyn offered his arm, and together they returned towards the house, in very unusual silence.

"So you *will* leave us?" she said, at last, with an attempt at a smile, which ended in her eyes filling with tears.

"I *must* leave you, dearest Mistress Sydney!" replied Mervyn, passionately. "Your father, dear Aurora, has extorted from me the secret of my love, and I am pledged to see you no more until I have done something to elevate myself from the degradation in which I am plunged—but trust me, loveliest, that shall soon be, or I will lie lower yet."

"And did my father treat you with—did he dare to remind you of this?" said Aurora, flushing vividly. "I tell you, then, Mervyn, though I love him better than all the world, myself included, yet in this matter neither he nor all the world shall hinder me from following the dictates of my heart. Here is my hand—if you accept it, I will be yours, and yours alone for ever; and though I will never marry you without my father's consent, I will never marry another."

And here, as our hero and heroine have assumed the character of avowed lovers, we shall close the conference between them, and proceed with our narrative, in the belief that the conversation of persons so situated has no interest for anybody but themselves.

In a few days Mervyn was regularly installed in Thanet House, and at work with all the eagerness and daring of youth in his new capacity of conspirator-general. In the exercise of this office he acquired an intimate knowledge of all the levers which the master-hand of Shaftesbury had organised, and he became aware that he had formed plot within plot of the most discordant and incongruous materials. Besides the open and constitutional parties of Sydney and Russell, he had formed a dark and violent conspiracy in a lower and more desperate grade of society. Mervyn found it impossible to make these two coalesce: the latter were ready and prepared for any measures, however violent; the former utterly refused to take a decided part until they had exhausted all the means of constitutional resistance.

Matters were in this state, when news suddenly reached Mervyn that Lord Shaftesbury had fled to Holland. Whether induced by the weakness of disease, or the immediate apprehensions of arrest, remained unknown, even to Mervyn, who merely received a commission from the earl, appointing him to the management of all his concerns in England, and a general assurance that he meant to return in a few weeks. And thus devolved upon Mervyn the uncontrolled management of one of the most difficult and dangerous webs of policy ever spun by the subtle genius of man.

Mervyn had now a station and a political importance which the extraordinary events of his life, his reputation for courage, and the known personal hatred of the King, increased, so as to put him almost on a level with the chiefs of the party. A borough devoted to Shaftesbury was pledged to elect him, if a parliament was again summoned.

Mervyn's visits to Sydney Place, though he economised the happiness as much as possible, were neither few nor far between, and Sydney seemed to have forgotten his regulation, for Aurora never failed to make one of the party. It is true that she was almost always surrounded by a

buzzing crowd of admirers, but there was a slight yet exquisite distinction—a tenderness invisible to all but a lover's eyes—in her manner to Mervyn, which made him feel as secure as if she had none, and enabled him even to enjoy the homage and universal admiration which she excited.

Meanwhile an open insurrection had been tacitly resolved on by the conspirators, and a tangible means and opportunity were all that remained in discussion, when one morning Howard (who, by-the-bye, had taken a great liking to our hero since he had been in a condition to lend money) rushed into Mervyn's apartments with the information that he had formed a plan which would supersede every other; but he declared that, to judge of its feasibility, he must accompany him to a place in the country, whither he would not tell.

Mervyn readily consented. They mounted their horses without attendants, and rode under Howard's direction till they reached the north road ere Mervyn inquired whither they were going; but Howard laughingly refused all satisfaction on this point, and they continued their road apparently towards St. Albans; but before they reached that town Howard suddenly turned eastward across the country, and they emerged on the Cambridge road. The badness of this by-road considerably fatigued the horses, but Howard continued to put them to their mettle until they arrived in sight of the Lea, as it flows through its sweet pastoral landscape. Here he somewhat slackened his speed, and, pointing to a house whose chimneys rose above a fine group of trees, announced that it was their destination, and that an old friend awaited him there.

Mervyn perceived, on a nearer inspection, that they were approaching a square battlemented building, fortified with two towers, one square, and the other round and peaked. It had an arched entrance and a fortified gate, and had apparently been in former times the castellated dwelling of some warlike gentleman; but it was at present degraded into a farmhouse, as appeared by the numerous outhouses which extended on both sides of the road, which was sheltered by a thick wood of birch and oak.

As they drew near the agricultural purposes to which the mansion was applied became more apparent. Oxen and cows stood in a shady pool near the house, peacocks

strutted about, and the various sounds of a busy farmyard blended with the perpetual whirr of a mill, which they now observed among the oaks, turned by a roaring current. The tower seemed used as a barn ; there was a loaded wain piled up with corn at one of the windows, and a strong athletic man in his shirt-sleeves, who seemed to be the master, stood on the top forking the sheaves down.

Into this yard the travellers rode, and almost up to the cart, without being observed, when Howard whistled a peculiar air, known only to the initiated. The man on the cart shouted some cant words in reply, and sliding himself dexterously down the corn, presented to Mervyn's gaze the slashed features of his quondam acquaintance, Rumbold. The meeting was cordial almost to roughness ; and Rumbold, assisting them to dismount, led them proudly into the establishment, which he named the "Rye House," and announced himself to be the master of it.

The most hospitable attentions were now heaped on the guests. Their horses were transferred to the stables, and themselves to neat apartments, where they were left to refresh. Meanwhile the preparations for dinner were hastened and improved, and Rumbold greeted them on their descent, in a handsome dress cut in the newest style. They were then ushered into a large oaken parlour, substantially furnished, where Mrs. Rumbold appeared in a full blaze of finery. Howard found time to whisper to Mervyn that she had been the widow of a rich maltster, and had made over herself and her property to the disfigured old roundhead soldier. The conversation at dinner was principally made up of dissertations on farming and malting, and Mervyn inwardly marvelled in what this farce was to end ; but as the fair hostess was too much delighted with her company to retire immediately after dinner, he was kept for some time longer in suspense. At last Howard proposed that they should go out and see the improvements in the farm, and the hint being readily taken by Rumbold, they all sallied forth.

Immediately they were out of earshot of the house, Mervyn led the conversation towards the subject of his thoughts by inquiring—"Have you heard, my lord, when Old Rowley goes to Newmarket? Is it next week, as usual?"

"So 'tis confidently said," replied Howard; "but

Captain Mervyn is not yet in the heart of our mystery," added he, turning to Rumbold, "and I must explain a little; but 'tis not possible to have things in readiness to make the attempt as they *go*. Look you, Mervyn," he continued, "we have the notablest plot afoot that ever was, for lopping the two sparks. But let us first view the localities. Here, you see, is the Newmarket road." And he stepped out of the yard on to the road by which they had arrived.

"Ay, the directest road to Newmarket, whereby the King and the duke always go to the races," said Rumbold, eagerly taking up the word. "You see, sir, it passes through the heart of my farmyard, and is flanked by my outhouses and that scattered wood——"

"Not so loud, Master Rumbold," interrupted Howard, in his turn. "But now let me explain, for I planned the whole matter, and should understand it best. Now, Mervyn, boy, were it not as easy as snaring partridges, to ambush some forty resolute men in the wood and outhouses, hedges and ditches, and what not? Then it were a cheap accident to overturn a cart in the road, and so stop the king's coach—he is seldom guarded by above thirty horsemen—one well-aimed discharge would empty half their saddles, then out upon them and empty the rest. Charley must either be death's prisoner or ours; meanwhile our friends in London and the country must be aware of some project afoot, and be ready to explode insurrections in all parts. It will be easy for us to escape through fields and by-lanes till such time as we can join our masses, and be hailed as saviours of the nation. Fore gad! an excellent plot.—What ails you, captain?" added he, on observing the effect of his communication on Mervyn; "do you show the white feather after all?"

"Assassinate the King! murder him?" repeated Mervyn, in a horror-struck tone. "Never, never! I cannot consent to it. It were sufficient to overwhelm our cause with horror. The Republic itself would demand our heads."

"Is this the thick-and-thin gentleman you told me of, Howard?" said Rumbold, obviously much disconcerted.

"He who says I will not go as far in my cause as any man, lies," exclaimed Mervyn. "But assassinate—dip my hands in the King's blood—I will not. Sydney would be the first to execrate such a deed. Seize him if you will:

bring him, like his father, to a trial, for his treason to the people—bring him to the block. I am ready and willing to lay down my life in such an attempt; but I will assassinate no man, though he were Nero himself."

"Now he hath set his nose against the wind, he will run till he burst," said Howard, coarsely. "Would not the King have assassinated *you*, but for Sydney's good memory?"

"Yet perchance he hath reason," said Rumbold, musingly. "This age is too squeamish for such noble acts of Roman virtue to be prosperous; and if *his* head too rolled on the block, I know not whether it were not of more terrible ensample, having such majesty of deliberate justice."

"'Tis ill salving a mortifying wound; cut to the quick at once!" exclaimed Howard. "But supposing that we attempted merely the seizure of the royal persons, we must do that with a sharp conflict, and how can we march a little army here unobserved if we are not to attempt a surprise?"

"But we will attempt a surprise," said Mervyn; "only let our *object* be, if possible, to spare the tyrant for a higher disposal. If he falls resisting, his blood be on his own head."

"And if you capture him, where will you take him and yourselves?" said Howard, sneeringly.

"I will rouse London simultaneously; I have the means," returned Mervyn. "This house, and such forces as we can hastily muster, would be strong enough to resist, in the first consternation, until we hear good news from our friends; at worst the King's safety will guarantee ours."

Rumbold and Howard seemed apparently convinced by this reasoning, and it was finally resolved that the attempt should be made in the manner recommended by Mervyn. Emissaries were to be dispatched to prepare a general revolt, and the citizens were to hold themselves in readiness. They even concerted a plan of the barricade which was to stop the royal carriages, the means necessary to turn the Rye House into a little fortress, and the places where the horsemen might meet without raising suspicions. Howard engaged to procure the men for this desperate enterprise, and Rumbold was to have all in readiness at the scene of action.

Mervyn's task was of a different but not less hazardous complexion. He was to set all the wheels of the conspiracy in motion in the various parts to which its machinery extended, and then to cross the seas and bring back Shaftesbury to head the outbreak. The great influence of the earl, and his perfect knowledge of the men and means to be employed, made it impossible to attempt anything without him, and the plot was too dangerous a secret to be entrusted to a letter or a common messenger. Finally, it was agreed that the Moderates, as they called the Russell and Sydney fractions of the party, should know nothing of the matter in hand until Shaftesbury arrived to conciliate them with his influence.

To prevent suspicion, it was resolved that Mervyn should embark at some distant seaport, and after some difficulties and delays in the needful arrangements, he was actually setting his foot on the deck of the vessel which was to bear him from Hull to Amsterdam on his mission to Shaftesbury, when news reached him of the sudden death of that nobleman.

This information had arrived at Thanet House before Mervyn could return thither, and on his again presenting himself he found that he had already ceased to be its master. Everything was under lock and seal, the servants dispersed and strangers in possession, and finding it useless to urge any claims of his own, he took his departure, resolving to find out Howard, and ascertain how matters had gone in his absence. They met at a coffee-house in the vicinity of Howard's residence, and the earl brought with him Colonel Rumsey, Shaftesbury's most trusted and intriguing instrument.

"So, poor Shaftesbury is gone! cut off in full blossom!" was Howard's first observation, after wringing Mervyn's hand with seeming cordiality.

"The court hath some inkling of our plot; have you not heard?" said Rumsey, hurriedly, "there is a warrant out against you, Captain Mervyn, as a seditious, ill-disposed person. Heaven knows who will be the next."

"We will take our prisoners first without a warrant, Master Rumsey," said Mervyn, calmly. "In three days the King or I shall be in the Tower; and I trust in my good star."

"Nay, then you do not know that the King is returned

safe and sound to London?" replied Howard. "The malignancy of fate would have it so, that a fire broke out in Newmarket, and burned part of the royal lodgings, so Rowley and the duke left it a week earlier than we expected."

"So now there is nothing for us but to stir," said Rumsey. "Our heads are in the lion's jaw, and he begins to wag his tail. Our friends, the Moderates, are met to dispute on what is *not* to be done now Shaftesbury is gone, and we are going to try and coax them into something valorous. Come with us, Master Mervyn, and lend us your eloquence."

Mervyn readily assented, and the three took their way to the house of Mr. Hampden, where the Moderates held their meeting, although he himself was something of a deeper dye. In a handsome apartment, furnished in the pompous style of the Louis Quatorze era, Mervyn found the chiefs of the party assembled—Monmouth, Essex, Russell, Sydney, and the young master of the house, who all received him with great cordiality. They were all in deep mourning, but the table was covered with a rich dessert, and glittering wines of every growth and colour, the better to blind the eyes of the court to their proceedings.

"You come in the very nick of time—we have just appointed a cabal to manage the party, and you shall be one of us, captain," said the Duke of Monmouth. "Shaftesbury was but one man, but it takes all of us to replace him—like twenty-seven shillings for a moidore; and you, who know the clue to all his plots, will be half himself among us."

"No, my lord, I aspire to no such honour," replied Mervyn; "I am but an instrument; use me as such, and if I fail your hand I shall break, not bend."

"There are six of us, yet odd numbers *are* lucky," said Essex, with a forced smile.

"At all events, it is no longer time to deliberate when Catiline is at the door," said Rumsey. "We must either fight or fly. Know you not, gentlemen, that there is an order for Master Mervyn's arrest? What will be next, think you?"

"There is but one question—shall we die like sheep, or make an effort for our own lives and the liberty of the nation?" exclaimed Howard. "Colonel Sydney, do you

still believe the times are not yet ripe, or do they need our blood to make them bear fruit ? "

" My sword is loose in the scabbard," replied Sydney.

" Then, gentlemen, let us determine at once ! " exclaimed Mervyn. " Revolt—and revolt at once, ere men's minds have time to chill into submission. Let our only questions be the where, the when, and the how."

" I am for the country—the west country—it was predicted to me I should fight a great battle there," said Monmouth. " What can one do in the city ? It would be impossible to stand a charge of the King's horse unless the train-bands declare for us, and they are but over-fed squeamish citizens, who prefer their fat ease to everything."

" Let us barricade the city, as the people of Paris did in the days of the Fronde," said Sydney. " I will undertake to hold London against ten thousand men for three weeks, if we can only make good the first three hours."

" Give me two hundred men, and I will surprise you the guards, and the Tower—I know they keep no soldierly precaution," said Mervyn.

" No, let us begin at a distance if we would prosper," said Monmouth, vehemently. " It hath been prophesied to me that my star—I mean the star of the Republic —shall rise in the west, like the royal sun ! Taunton for me ! the King will have to take his choice of these two horns—either to send down his forces and leave the city unprotected, or give us time to form in the country if he does not."

" But leaving this question to future digestion, another of more importance claims our attention," said Lord Russell. " Where are our magazines and sinews of war ? —what preparations have we made to furnish our friends with arms ?—or, indeed, how can we procure them without arousing the watchdogs of the government ? "

" Ay, where is the gold, the dollars ?—we cannot stir without gold ! " exclaimed Howard. " For my own part, I am an exhausted mine, an Escorial, as the Spaniard hath it—but I can pledge my wife's jewels."

" In good faith, we shall need some twenty or thirty thousand pounds to begin on," said Monmouth. " I will subscribe all I can drain from my Jews—but that will be little enough. Moor Park is pawned."

" My Lord Grey sends word that he will subscribe ten

thousand guineas from his private purse," said Rumsey, with a laugh, in which the whole company joined heartily.

"But ere we advance farther, it were well, nay, necessary," said Sydney, "to consider how to make a coalition of counsels with Scotland; and for that purpose let us select some fit person to be sent thither, to unite us into one sense and care."

"Argyle and the clan Campbell are ready at the whistle of a pibroch," said Monmouth. "And there is my Lord Melvin or Sir John Cockram willing enough to speak to the principal men of our interest in those parts."

"Nay, for they cannot put their nightcaps on but a Lauderdale spy reports it," said Lord Essex. "It must be some new face in Scotland—what say you to Master Mervyn?—It will need great management, too, for Lauderdale hangs before he tries."

"If I am hanged, my lord, it shall be in London," replied Mervyn. "I tell you again, I am a soldier, not a politician."

"And Mervyn's great knowledge in Shaftesbury's plans are essential to our own," said Howard.

"Well, sirs, I know another who may match the devil for cunning—Master Aaron Smith," said Sydney.

"I will engage to bring my Lord Melvin in—he is something of my wife's kindred," said Monmouth. "And if my Lord Russell will write to Sir John, to whom he is personally known——"

"Aaron will manage it admirably—a subtle dog—I know him well," interrupted Lord Howard. "But for what purpose are these gentlemen to be brought to London?"

"To form a plan of operations with us," said Monmouth. "Argyle hath but to unsheath his claymore, as Captain Mervyn knows, and the Highlands are all ablaze. But the man will need money, and who hath any at his dispose?"

"Give the Scots but gold, and they will rebel every day of the year against anything or anybody," said Rumsey. "But I am of Captain Mervyn's opinion, and would have the flame burst out in every part of the kingdom at once."

"Let us hear Master Mervyn's list of those towns on which poor Shaftesbury principally depended, and would have had us throw the sparks in," said Lord Russell, in his usual calm and deliberative manner.

"London, Bristol, Taunton, York, Chester, Exeter," poured out Mervyn.

"A goodly catalogue," said Sydney.

"And now we have united ourselves in this dangerous undertaking," said Hampden, "it may be well to ask a question which has already been put to me—To what end is all this? It is meet that we direct our proceedings by such principles as shall not put in jeopardy the properties and liberties of the people. For mine own part, I would resolve into the authority of a parliament."

"And that chosen fairly, not by a few chartered rich men, but by the whole mass of the people," said Sydney, eagerly.

"I trust we are all agreed that it is only the public good we intend," said Monmouth, with a dark frown. "But for my part, I know that, though the Scotch may be brought to it in time, the noblemen there will not at present suffer a commonwealth."

"We have conquered them under kings, why not under the republic?" said Sydney, sharply.

"Let us not quarrel about the skin till we have caught the bear," said Lord Russell. "But meanwhile we have sat so long in deliberation that it is time to part, if we would not make a tale for the Cabal's ear to-morrow Let us resolve nothing until our messenger returns from Scotland, and agree not to meet again till then, lest we rouse suspicion."

"You will be too late, then," said Mervyn, passionately. "You are putting off the day of danger as you think, but it will only bring it faster on."

"The fox that had lost his tail would fain persuade his brethren to cut off theirs," said Monmouth, with a bitter smile.

"Come to my house, you will be safe there awhile," said Sydney, warmly extending his hand to the young conspirator.

"Rather to mine, Sydney," said Lord Russell, significantly.

"To neither, my lord," said Howard, hastily. "I will lend him a horse, and he shall to our friend Rumbold's in the country, till this wind blow over. I have prepared all for his reception."

Mervyn readily accepted this alternative. It was agreed

that he should wait at the Rye House for the messenger's return from Scotland, and the meeting broke up in a state of uncertainty on all the points on which it had been convened.

It was a fine frosty moonlight when Mervyn found himself on the Cambridge road, well mounted and alone, on his way to Rumbold's fatal farm. The bright freshness of the country air somewhat cooled his fevered blood, and a mood of deep melancholy followed, in which he allowed his horse to fall into a tranquil walk. Unwilling to alarm the family at the Rye by a night arrival, he allowed the animal to continue its sauntering pace till daylight broke, when he thought that Rumbold, who was a man of very active habits, would shortly be astir. He was right in his conjectures, for, on turning into the Rye road, the first person he met was Rumbold himself, coming at a rapid gallop, well armed, and in such haste, that he was upon Mervyn almost before he could turn out of the way.

"Why, Master Rumbold, this is strange riding," he exclaimed, as the colonel suddenly drew a pistol from his girdle in a distracted manner, but, as suddenly recognising him, let it sink in great amazement.

"What, Captain Mervyn! whither so early?" he said.

"To your house—for shelter," replied Mervyn.

"You seek, then, more than the owner himself can find," replied Rumbold. "I have certain intelligence that the folks at Whitehall have found out everything, and I have but three hours' start to get out of the clutches of a sergeant-at-arms."

"Whence have you this intelligence?"

"From that damnable paltry villain West, and little Keeling the vintner. They were going to tell the council everything because they are named in the proclamation with you."

"Save yourself then; I will return and put Howard on the wing," said Mervyn. "I can do it in a couple of hours, and if no better can be done, we will off to the Hague together."

"You can't do it on that blown horse—take mine; I have a good start," said the generous maltster. "And here is a swig of brandy; it will do you good, for you look as pale as a turnip."

Mervyn at first declined this noble offer, but considering how much depended on his speed, he at length consented, and, embracing very heartily, the two conspirators parted, never to meet again on earth.

CHAPTER LI

THE ADDLING OF A CONSPIRACY

Mervyn proceeded rapidly on his way back to London till he reached a hill near Barnet, in descending which his horse stumbled and came to the ground, breaking both its knees; and finding it impossible to proceed, he led the animal to Barnet, stowed it at a farrier's, and endeavoured to procure another. But as he was quite unknown in the town, and had but little money with him, no one would trust him with so valuable an article, and, distracted with the delay, he resolved to resume his journey on foot. He arrived in London about noonday, almost too faint to stand, covered with dust, and disfigured from head to foot, so that he could scarcely be recognised even by those who best knew him. The first thing he heard on reaching Holborn was a proclamation offering a reward of one hundred pounds each for nine of the inferior actors in the Rye House Plot, and of a thousand for Monmouth, Lord Grey, or himself. On inquiry of a bystander, he learned that Lord Russell had been before the privy council, and was sent to the Tower; but this was positively denied by one who had seen his lordship return to his own house under a guard.

Howard, however, was not named, and in the distracted state of his mind Mervyn could resolve on no plan but to seek him out and ascertain the real state of things. He dared not trust any one with a message, and he therefore determined to go to Aumerle House; in half an hour he stood on the steps of that mansion. He had never been in it since his arrest by Oates; for, singularly enough, Howard never invited him to his house, nor of course had he ever desired to enter it himself. All seemed quiet, and it was not fear, but an inexplicable chaos of feelings,

which shook his hand as he lifted the massive knocker. The door flew open with strange rapidity, and with a start he saw that it was opened by a soldier. His presence of mind did not, however, desert him, and he inquired for the Lord Howard.

"Come in; all's fish that comes to the net," replied the soldier; and observing Mervyn hesitate, "Come in, master dusty!" he added, levelling his arquebuse. "You must have my captain's permission ere I suffer you to depart."

Finding that no better could be done, Mervyn pretended a ready acquiescence, and the soldier escorted him upstairs. Everything was in confusion, the servants standing about, and the house in a state of general disorder. He was conducted by his guide, or rather captor, into the grand drawing-room, where his first interview with Lady Howard had taken place, when introduced by Blood. But things were much changed: a number of soldiers were engaged in ransacking and searching about, with their swords drawn, piercing the tapestry, and seemingly in active pursuit of some concealed object. An old, stern-looking officer directed their proceedings with the motion of his pistols, and a clerk stood near him, engaged in making an inventory of the articles around. Lady Howard herself sat in an arm-chair, pale as death, her brows deeply furrowed, her hands clasped—a statue of resolute desperation.

"You see, sir, it is impossible!" she was saying as they entered. "He is not here; he has gone to Holland —'tis a week since. He is safe at Amsterdam, I hope."

"It cannot be, madam," replied the commander. "His lordship was seen yesterday in the Mall; I will stay here till doomsday, but I will clutch him. His bed was warm —here are his doublet, shoes, sword—my men surround the house—he cannot have escaped. It were well, methinks, if he saved me further trouble, for I am certain he is here, and I will take the house down brick by brick, ere he shall 'scape me."

"You will find that difficult, Sir Philip—my ancestors built it strongly," said the countess, scornfully. "But continue your search; be sure and do not neglect to examine the swallows' nests on the eaves there."

At this moment Mervyn's captor stepped up and whispered to Sir Philip, who turned sharply round. "What

sort of fellow is't ? " he said. " By'r lady, a tall likely lad—who the fiend are you, man ? "

" My lord's bailiff at Eskricke, for the receipts, sir," said Mervyn, in a counterfeited tone of stupidity.

The first sound of his voice made Lady Howard start, and she looked or rather glared at him for a moment, like a famished she-wolf.

" Do you know this man, madam ? " said the captain, startled at the wild expression of her eyes.

" Know him ! " she said, or rather shrieked, and, springing up, she extended her hand in vehement denunciation. " Yes, Sir Philip. Seize him ! he is a traitor. Seize him ! I will prove him a traitor. It is the bastard—it is a Rye House plotter—Mervyn, as he calls himself."

" If I am a traitor, madam, then so is your husband," said Mervyn, calmly.

" Thou liest, miserable villain ! he is no traitor," she shrieked. " Perish the very name of Aumerle ere one hair of his head be hurt ! "

" Surrender yourself, sir—you are in the proclamation ; but this violence, lady, is strange and unchristian," said Sir Philip.

" My name is Mervyn, and I surrender myself," replied the young man, with desperate composure.

" Give me your sword, sir ; I am sorry for you," said the captain ; and Mervyn was sullenly preparing to unbuckle it, when a shriek from Lady Howard announced that something terrible had occurred. All turned, and a soldier was observed dragging a man's leg down the chimney, followed by the rest of the body, all begrimed with soot, and in shirt and drawers. Black as he was, and trembling all over as if in an ague, Mervyn easily recognised Lord Howard. There was an immediate rush of all present round him, and seizing the moment with the desperate energy of his character, Mervyn sprang to an open window, and leaped out of it, with scarce a glance to ascertain whither he was going. He found himself instantly in a bed of carnations, on a terrace of the garden, and within a few yards of the river—the next moment and he was plunged in its waters. Aware, however, that he should be closely pursued, he swam desperately to a coal-barge, which proved to have no one on board, and

creeping into the hold among the coals, with his sword in his hand, he awaited his fate.

Hours elapsed without any molestation, although he was occasionally alarmed by the voices of passing bargemen. Night came on before he ventured to peep out of his concealment, and the stars shone in the dark waters like a bespangled veil, and the huge sombre masses of the great city seemed to slumber to its calm rippling. Apprehensions that those belonging to the barge might return and discover him now took possession of his mind, and he determined at all risks to make for the land. He therefore hailed a small sculler, which was shooting rapidly past to Whitehall, and inquired if he could be taken thither. The waterman replied that he had another fare for the same place, and that he might come and welcome, and Mervyn leaped on board.

He immediately looked out for his fellow-fare, but did not perceive it till the waterman, with a laugh, pointed to a figure reclined at full length on the prow. It was habited in the usual garb of a doctor of the Church, but the peruke and skull-cap had fallen off and revealed to Mervyn's startled eye the features of Dr. Oates, in a state of beastly intoxication. He was snoring audibly, and sucking in air like a stranded whale.

"Brute!" muttered Mervyn, shuddering with intense disgust, and he sat for some minutes looking at his bloated countenance, which was rendered frightful by the convulsive twists which passed over it. An evil conscience, not to be lulled either by liquor or sleep, seemed at work within, and Mervyn could not help feeling a vindictive pleasure in the sight. But suddenly the boat touched Whitehall Stairs with a stroke which roused the drunkard, who started up in apparent consternation. With a glare around him, he gave a sullen yawn, threw the waterman a penny, and staggered out of the boat. A thought suddenly occurred to Mervyn, and flinging the waterman his fare, he leaped out after him.

Oates staggered drunkenly along from the stairs, and proceeded a little distance up the lonely road which skirted the royal gardens. An attentive survey satisfied Mervyn that no one was within sight likely to interrupt his proceedings; he then walked rapidly after Oates, who, hearing the sound, turned sharply. The moment his eye fell

upon Mervyn he uttered a shrill scream, and falling on his knees, clamoured loudly for mercy.

"Do you mistake me for your master, the devil, wretch?" said Mervyn, slightly touching him with his sheathed sword.

"Oh, sir, take my money, my watch, anything but my life!" yelled the terrified villain.

"I want none of them," said Mervyn, fiercely; "but strip off those disgraced canonicals and that peruke, or there are not three minutes between you and damnation!"

Oates obeyed, sobbing like a beaten schoolboy, and as he stripped off his holy garb, Mervyn transferred it rapidly to his own person. Even the peruke, though with great disgust, he put on, and, telling Oates that if he stirred within an hour from the spot he would infallibly pistol him, he gave him a parting kick, and went on. Some few minutes brought him to St. Martin's Church, which was then striking ten, and he paused to consider his ulterior proceedings. The only chance of escape which suggested itself in his desperate and moneyless circumstances was to take refuge at the residence of Colonel Sydney, if still that sanctuary were respected. He therefore struck into the fields between St. James's and St. Giles's, and arrived at Sydney Place within an hour.

With a heavy and foreboding heart he rang the huge bell of the garden, which he had so often heard tinkle the rarest music, as it seemed to his lover ear, and the door was opened by the faithful old steward, Ducas, with a tremulous caution which struck a chill of terror to his very soul. The moon shone brightly, but Ducas did not seem to recognise him, and answered his hurried request to see the colonel by an abrupt assurance that he was gone to town, and had not returned.

"His daughter, then; is Mistress Sydney at home?"

"What may your reverence want with her?" replied the old man, suspiciously eyeing the wild and begrimed priest before him.

"I am from Taunton—the great Mr. Trenchard's chaplain," replied Mervyn. "Give my lady this small sign; she will not refuse me admittance."

And he handed a ring to Ducas, who no longer refused him the privilege of *entrée*. He followed the old man into the flower-garden before the house, and throwing himself

exhausted into a chair formed of the twisted boughs of a living elm, awaited the result of his application in a state of indescribable agitation. But a few moments elapsed, and a light fawn-like step was heard. Mervyn sprang up, and the next instant his beautiful and beloved mistress was clasped to his breast, in a mingled agony of joy and grief, which vented itself in a strange paradox of smiles and tears.

"You are safe, Mervyn; they can find nothing against my father, and I am happy now," said Aurora, at last releasing herself gently from his embrace. "But what brings you from Rumbold's? We thought you were in security there."

Mervyn briefly narrated all that had passed, and her terror seemed to increase with every word of his relation, although he stood before her safe from the fangs of his enemies.

"Oh, it is all the malignity of that cruel king!" she sobbed; "why should that barbarous woman betray you? What have you done that you should be arrested any more than my father?"

"Russell is arrested; I was Shaftesbury's lieutenant," replied Mervyn, hurriedly.

"But you are almost dead with fatigue; come in, come in; you are sufficiently disguised in this garb until my father returns, when we can devise means for your escape," said Aurora with visible trepidation. "You shall to your old apartment, and I will give out——"

"You will not exile me from your society, Aurora, the last moments I may ever spend in it?" said Mervyn, with a sadness which again melted her to a gush of tears.

"No, no! But there is some one there—one whom I cannot leave," she replied, with hesitation.

"Some sparkling beau of the court, whose sunshine of fortune makes the darkness of mine too sombre to your taste, Aurora," he replied, with vehemence.

"No, Mervyn, no; a fugitive in hiding like yourself; a man who is your friend;—in short, the Duke of Monmouth."

"The Duke of Monmouth!" repeated Mervyn, with a start.

"Yes," said Aurora, without seeming to notice Mervyn's surprise and tone. "Come and join us: if even the

duke recognises you, he is your friend ; but I think what might puzzle my penetration will baffle his. Come, dear Mervyn, it shall be so."

Mervyn was almost ashamed of his momentary suspicion, but he complied, and followed Mistress Sydney to the library. The table was spread with a supper of fruit and confections, and wines glittering among snow in Sydney's Italian vases ; everything looked as if some distinguished guest were present. And there, reclining voluptuously, in an arm-chair, splendidly dressed and profusely perfumed, and languidly thrumming a Moresco guitar, sat the ducal conspirator. As it was a very hot night the windows were open, and showed a wide expanse of starry blue, hanging like a canopy over the distant yellow glare of the vast city ; and it seemed as if he were reclining, in amorous languor, to catch the sweet fresh air which blew over the fields of new-mown hay surrounding Sydney's little Paradise. He raised his eyes, and his eyebrows too, when Mervyn entered, and seemed to look upon him with any feeling but that of welcome. Aurora introduced her lover under a name which he selected himself, as Master Tobias Venner, chaplain to Trenchard of Taunton, who was one of the conspirators, and of great consequence in the west. Monmouth himself passed for one Captain Stuart.

" Well, your reverence, and what are the news out of the west ? " said Monmouth, after a fixed stare at the stranger, without recognising him. " Or, rather I should say, out of the coal-hole whence you seem to have recently emerged ? "

" You are correct in your supposition, sir," replied Mervyn, in a feigned voice. " And perhaps there are worse places than a coal-hole in these troublous times."

" Since I have been so successful in my first hypothesis, allow me to hazard a second," continued the duke, with a good-natured smile. " I cannot help thinking I have seen you before, Master Toby, when your face was not so black, and your beauty was of a cleaner, though not more striking description."

" Right again, sir," replied Mervyn.

" Nay, Mistress Sydney, you must resume your former seat, or I shall owe Master Toby a spite for life," said Monmouth eagerly, observing that Aurora had drawn a chair near the stranger, leaving her own unoccupied.

Ducas now entered, and spread another cloth for Mervyn, with viands of a more substantial nature than those before him. Mervyn was too exhausted to eat, but he swallowed a goblet of wine, which Aurora handed him, with eagerness, and it seemed to infuse a new life into his veins.

"Well, Master Toby, you have not answered my questions about the good people of the west," said Monmouth. "Are they all running hurry-scurry in every direction? And how do they like the new Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys, who, they say, is to pay them a visit this autumn?"

"The consternation is boundless, or it would not have reached an humble servant of the Church like myself," replied Mervyn. "But all men unite in saying that had it not been for the timorous delays of the Duke of Monmouth and his friends, the Whitehall people would now have been as glad of a coal-hole as the best of us may live to be yet."

"Say nothing against the Duke of Monmouth, friend; he is the best fellow in England, myself not excepted," said the duke gaily. "But are there any news about Captain Mervyn, who ran away like that sagacious animal, the rat, long before any one else saw the house was falling?"

"Captain Mervyn is safe, I am happy to say—fled to Holland," said Aurora, with affected carelessness.

"Well, we will drink his good health, and a happy voyage to him! He will marry some Dutch squaw, and turn tulip-grower," said Monmouth, filling his goblet, although he had evidently indulged freely already. Monmouth's wild blood seemed now afire with the two passions which held strongest sway in his mercurial temperament.

"I'll wager my head still that I lose or circle it with a crown!" said he, after some general conversation. "And then—I know where to look for a queen whose beauty shall add a lustre to the diamonds of her royal wreath."

"Your lady-wife? She is, indeed, held fair," said Aurora, blushing with much displeasure at the eager gaze which the duke fixed upon her.

"Oh, I will have my Woodstock and my Fair Rosamond," said Monmouth; "or I will play bluff King Hal, and make the loveliest woman in England (for the time being) the highest. And can you doubt who that is, Mistress Sydney?"

"The wine plays you false, Captain Stuart!" said Aurora, snatching her hand away which Monmouth attempted to take.

"Nay, lady, it but opens the door to imprisoned truths!" replied Monmouth. "I dote on you—I say it before this reverend man—I hold my life as a thing of no price but such as your beauty gives it! Marry, were it not better to be a king's belamour than the most lawful wife of a Dutch herring-skipper?"

"Of a Dutch herring-skipper? You keep me amazed, my lord!" said Aurora.

"Why, men report you have a sneaking kindness for Master Mervyn; and must he not turn to that if he would keep his body and soul acquainted in Holland?" replied Monmouth.

"But is there no better occupation there for a gallant young soldier than catching herrings?" said Aurora, with an irrepressible smile, but she looked vexed too.

"Gallant young soldier!" repeated Monmouth scornfully. "Base intriguing spy, you mean, Mistress Sydney. I have no doubt that it was he who betrayed us all, and will perhaps bring your father to the block. He is but a tool and subtle instrument of the Papists. It was he who balked that noble plan in Scotland—and have you forgotten his share in Godfrey's murder?"

"In Godfrey's murder!" echoed Aurora, her whole face illumining with indignation, "in Godfrey's murder! I would this were not my father's roof, that I might tell you what I think of this most false and unmanly accusation."

"Were he here I would tell him the same to his face!" returned the duke impetuously.

"And were he here he would tell you to your face that you lie—that you lie basely and blackly!" shouted Mervyn in his natural tones.

"The lie! Ha! think you your cloth shall protect such insolence?" exclaimed Monmouth with flashing eyes; and clutching what he fondly deemed was the hair of his antagonist, intending to deal him a blow, he merely pulled off his peruke, and his thick black locks fell in clusters on his shoulders.

"Mervyn!" exclaimed the duke, with a start.

"You know me now, son of Mrs. Lucy Waters!" said Mervyn. "And I know you better than ever I thought

to do, and henceforth I hate you worse than the detestable tyrant whom you please to call your father."

"I am a king's bastard at least: you are a false thief and murtherer's!" exclaimed Monmouth, grasping his sword-hilt.

"Let us try, then, which is worthier of his parentage," said Mervyn, drawing his sword in frantic rage.

But Aurora rushed between them, and rang a bell on the table to summon assistance. The door opened almost immediately, but it was to admit Sydney himself.

"My lord, news, news!" he exclaimed, entering in such agitation that he did not at first notice that of his guests. "What in Heaven's name is this? Swords? Mervyn—my lord, what is this?"

"I chanced to pay Mistress Sydney some slight gallantry, and he takes upon him to be jealous—this new arrival of ours!" said the duke confusedly. "Forsooth, this beggar of Colonel Blood's strain is jealous of a granddaughter of the great Northumberland! You will have a precious son-in-law, an you use not your eyes, Sydney."

"This is no time for these matters," said Sydney hastily. "The duchess is informed that your retreat is discovered, and York's halberdiers are on their way to search my house. The King hath sent word that her apartments are secure—a hint that you may take refuge there. A coach waits to convey you, and there is no time to be lost, for Howard is seized, and, as they say, hath confessed some strange conspiracy in Hertfordshire, and implicates us all."

"I will depart then instantly," said Monmouth, turning very pale. Then, rallying, he added, "My uncle would give more for my head than for a German boar's, epicure as he is. Farewell, dear lady, and Heaven keep you from harm."

"Hark! it is the tramp of horse—away, sir!" exclaimed Sydney. "Mervyn, resume your disguise—there is no other safety for you."

The duke snatched Aurora's hand to his lips, and wringing Sydney's, rushed out after Ducas, who led the way. Sydney then turned to Mervyn, and gravely inquired how he came there, and what had happened between him and the duke. He was in the midst of a very brief narrative, when the door opened, and Ducas entered with an appearance of great consternation, which needed no explanation, for

Sir Philip Lloyd followed close on his heels, with his sword drawn, and some axemen after him. All rose, and Aurora clung to her father's arm, who with a look admonished her to silence.

"Let me not disturb you, colonel," said Sir Philip, sheathing his sword when he observed the lady, and motioning the guard to remain at the door. "Mistress Sydney, your poor servant! I wish to spare you all unnecessary pain, but I must do my duty." And producing a paper, he added, "Here is a warrant from his Majesty in council to seize you, Mr. Algernon Sydney, and your papers."

"On what charge, Sir Philip?" said Sydney, with perfect composure.

"High treason."

"The court name for patriotism," said Sydney. "Reverend Master Venner, look to my daughter. Cheer up, Aury! Remember you are a Sydney—at worst 'tis but a temporary imprisonment."

"My father—oh, my dear father! Nothing shall separate us—I will go with you, though it be to death!" shrieked Aurora. And throwing herself into her father's arms, she fainted.

"Remove her—take her away—I can bear anything but this," said Sydney, with strong and visible emotion. "Alice! Master Venner, take her away!"

The old nurse rushed in at this moment, and, giving his daughter into her arms, Sydney went to Sir Philip, who was engaged in inspecting a heap of papers on the table.

"It is nothing but my Treatise against Sir Robert Filmer," he said with indifference.

"I must seize it, nevertheless," replied Sir Philip.

He then swept the table of its strewments, and packed them, with other papers which he found in a desk, into a trunk, which he sealed.

Hitherto Sir Philip had taken little or no notice of the scene which was going on in another part of the room, nor of Mervyn, though he took no pains to conceal himself. By this time Aurora had revived, but in vain did Sydney endeavour to reassure her—she clung about his neck and wept incessantly.

"Master Venner," said Sydney, turning to Mervyn, "promise me, if I return not by noon—though I doubt not to be bailed—to take my daughter to Penshurst, to her

uncle's protection. We are not on good terms, but he cannot refuse his niece shelter in such a time as this—nor you hospitality, good wanderer of the highways of truth."

Aurora seemed then, for the first time, to recollect her lover's danger, and she sat down, white and trembling and irresolute, while her father gently kissed her brow, and with a smile of heroic composure wrung the hand of Master Venner, and then left the room, followed by the guards and their packages, leaving his daughter once more insensible.

CHAPTER LIII

CLAUDE DUVAL

The greater portion of the dreadful day which dawned after these events was spent at Sydney Place in a state of indescribable anguish. Aurora had indeed by far the best hopes and conclusions, for her notions as to the extent and nature of the plot were of course limited ; but Mervyn, who kept locked in his own breast a clue to the terrible rumours which were afloat concerning the discovery of a new plot, suffered a complete hell of fears and anticipations. He knew that Sydney had had no part in the Rye House conspiracy, it is true ; but his own experience of royal justice gave him but little hope on that score, considering the personal hatred which the King bore against Sydney.

A few hours, however, brought better news. Ducas returned with tidings that, although the council had committed Sydney to the Tower, nothing of any consequence was deposed against him, and he expected to be liberated in a few days ; but meanwhile he desired Aurora to proceed instantly to Penshurst, under the protection of Master Venner. The propriety of this measure was undoubted ; and moreover, the secure refuge which it seemed to offer to Mervyn was an irresistible motive, for the hunt after him continued with unabated vigour. Tidings, too, arrived that Colonel Blood was liberated from the King's Bench, by an order of the Privy Council, and was busily engaged in tracking fugitives.

As it was late in the day when he received these instruc-

tions, Mervyn saw that no time was to be lost; but as a journey of thirty miles appeared to Alice of considerable extent, she occasioned a long delay by her preparations. At last, however, the family coach was sufficiently stowed, the four strong Flanders geldings were harnessed, and Mervyn, still in his canonicals, had the satisfaction to see his mistress, himself, and old Alice safely lodged in the vast old vehicle, and rolling over the courtyard. Ducas and a groom followed on horseback; and a coachman, who had been in the Sydney family, like an heirloom, for nearly fifty years, drove.

Mervyn did not anticipate any danger on the road, yet it was not without apprehensions that he marked the red glare of the sunset on the trees as they emerged from Sydney's grounds on the Tyburn road, as it was then called. Nevertheless, he took Aurora's hand with a smile of congratulation, and held it gently in his own to reassure her; for she was pale and trembled violently, and she smiled, too, with an expression of unbounded trust which troubled him, he scarce knew why. He tried to think it was the melancholy caused by the wild and stormy look of the sunset, and the loud cawing of the hereditary fooks in Sydney's venerable oaks, which seemed as if croaking an everlasting farewell to their departing protectors. A turn of the road shortly after showed them Tyburn, with its rising knolls crowned with broad and verdant trees, in the midst of which towered a gibbet, laden with the bodies of two malefactors recently executed. Mervyn shuddered; and at this moment a horseman galloped past the coach with very great rapidity, who seemed to look eagerly in at Aurora; and, momentary as the glance was, Mervyn thought he recognised the ominous visage of Colonel Blood. He took care, however, to keep this terrible suspicion in his own mind; and merely exhorting the steady old coachman to speed, which did not accelerate his accustomed rate in the smallest degree, on they went.

They drove slowly, and according to the resolute will of the old man, who would not have breathed his horses to save his own life, and crossing the river at Westminster, they presently emerged on the Kent Road. The town rapidly disappeared, then the scattered suburbs, and finally the open country lay before them; but the darkness increased, and the night wore every appearance of proving

a dismal one. The wind was high, and swept the clouds wildly over the face of the moon, and from time to time broad glares of lightning lit up the sky. Aurora was evidently alarmed, and at every flash looked for courage to her lover, whose smile of love seemed to reassure her.

Thus they proceeded for some time in eloquent silence, until they turned out on a wide unenclosed common, which Mervyn recognised as that of Wandsworth. It was covered with heath, and a range of low hills skirted the horizon, white on the summits with lightning; a dense wood, or rather forest, of larch and fir skirted the road on the left hand for several miles; but so far as the eye extended in the murky twilight, no human being nor human habitation appeared.

Mervyn now began to breathe a little more freely, and he was just turning to felicitate Aurora on their advance to safety, when suddenly a shrill and very melodious whistle met his ear. Mervyn put his head out of the window, and heard a shout of "Halt," from the wood, and two horsemen, with pistols raised, galloped on the road before the coach. Five or six more immediately appeared on all sides of the vehicle, presenting their pistols at the windows, and on Mervyn's side a cavalier, in a splendid scarlet riding dress, threw the door open, and shouted, "Your money or your lives!" Mervyn's desperate reply was drawing a pistol and firing it at the highwayman, but at the same moment he recognised him in time to sink his aim, so that he only shot the horse, which staggered back on its haunches, and then fell dead.

"Harm him not, harm him not!" shouted the highwayman, snatching back the levelled pistol of one of his companions as he sprang up. "It is my friend—it is my dear master's son—it is Captain Mervyn!"

"Claude Duval!" exclaimed Mervyn.

"And Mademoiselle Sydney! then is it you whom Blood is in pursuit of?" exclaimed Claude. "I saw him as I left London an hour ago, and I was to stop a carriage with a lady in it till he came up with some of his own myrmidons, telling me that it was a rascally Puritan eloping with a gentleman's daughter, and that all the plunder should be mine."

"Did he mean to seize the lady?" said Mervyn, hurriedly.

"Yes, and take her to Windsor, to her father there," said Claude. "But you shall not lack protection from that villain; I and these gallant fellows of mine will escort you within sight of Penshurst, or die to a man in the attempt."

Mervyn hesitated not a moment to accept this proposal. There was no time to be lost, and as Claude's horse was dead, he invited him to join them in the coach. The robbers seemed to obey their leader with the precision and implicitness of a military band, and under his orders four moved in advance, while three formed the rear-guard. This escort, with Ducas and Claude as an auxiliary, seemed sufficient to set all fears at rest, and they now moved rapidly forward over the heath.

Claude took his place beside Alice, but he had no sooner done so than the old woman exclaimed, "Eh, mercy! what is here? Master Duval, is it thee in good earnest?"

"What, mother Alice!" exclaimed Claude; "why, it is many a long year since I have seen your true-hearted face."

"You have often told me I am not Blood's son," said Mervyn, with affected cheerfulness. "If you know that, dear Duval, you must know who my father really was or is; tell me now, or it may be I shall die in ignorance."

"It were but to taunt you with vain hopes, Master Mervyn," said Claude, musingly; "yet as you say, it may be the last time we shall meet, and the malice of your enemies can inflict upon you no worse chances than those which menace you already. Alice," he said, turning to the old nurse, "do you recollect my lord's little foundling, whom you brought up at Mervyn?"

"Ay, and the very night that you took him away as if it were an hour ago, and how he was drowned during the great fire," said Alice, sadly.

"Should you know him by any mark?" continued Claude.

"Foreby his great likeness to my lord, he had the mark of a horseshoe on his left breast, and so had his father and all the true Aumerles since the old Lord Mervyn, that was a wizard and rode with the devil to Germany," replied Alice.

"There *is* a horseshoe mark on my breast," said Mervyn, "and many persons have thought I resembled that race. Am I, then, a Fitz-Aumerle?"

"You are the lawful heir of Aumerle, rightful owner of

all that Howard and his false countess enjoy," said Duval, vehemently.

"Nay, nay, that cannot be, Claude. My lord's wife had but one child before she eloped with Howard, and it died and was buried in London," said Alice.

"So it was given out, Alice," replied Duval; "but the foundling whom you nursed was that very child, as my lord acknowledged the night before he was murdered in the Tower; but all the documents and proofs are lost, or in the possession of the murderer Blood."

"Mean you to say, Claude, that the Lord Aumerle, he who committed suicide in the Tower, was my father?" said Mervyn, strongly agitated.

"Have you not been acknowledged so by the very hate of your enemies?" replied Claude. "Has not Howard's murtherous wife hunted you in every shape and form to the death? But suicide your noble father never committed; he was murdered. My poor master!" added he, with great emotion.

"There is much to confirm your tale, Claude—I ever had this foreboding on my heart," said Mervyn; "but if there be but one drop of Aumerle blood in my veins, I will pour it out to the last ere he shall lie in his grave unavenged. Yet, Claude, I have been in those chambers, I have heard the tale related there, and into them there is no entrance for a murderer, unless governor, warders, guards were all in the conspiracy. And is that probable? Would Sir John Robinson, a man of ancient name, would the good old Edwards share in so black a treason?"

"I know not why nor wherefore, but fire shall not burn that opinion out of me," said Claude, resolutely. "I will die in it—and that Blood committed the monstrous fact. *What voice was that which answered at a moment when the earl must have been in the agonies of death*—that rough and hoarse voice? His was ever mild and musical."

"But how could any woman—how could any mother," said Mervyn, with a shudder, "pursue her child to destruction, as Lady Howard hath pursued me?"

"She pursued your father to destruction before you," said Claude. "I have heard strange accounts of how she was compelled by her father to marry her cousin, the Lord Aumerle, although she was in love with the profligate Howard of Eskricke; but that my lord never knew till too

late. But she had many lovers besides—among the rest, Colonel Blood, then a dashing young soldier of fortune, and a man whom you knew well, Master Mervyn, a Belgian noble of high rank, who, after her marriage with Lord Aumerle, turned Jesuit, and became rector of St. Omer."

"Father Van Huysman!" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Yes," replied Claude. "However, there was always a kind of unhappiness in their union. My lord picked me up in Normandy only a few months before your birth, Master Mervyn. That was in London; and while she was yet scarce able to lift her head from the pillow, she summoned my lord to her bedside, and feigning that she thought herself in danger of death, and could not die with the dismal thought on her conscience of how she had wronged him—in brief, that the newly-born infant was not my lord's son, but Howard of Eskricke's. Do not blame your poor father, Mervyn, but it worked like madness in his brain, and he consented to all her cunning plots—gave out that you were dead in your cradle, and sent you privately to nurse at Mervyn—allowed her a separate maintenance, though he would not agree to a divorce lest she should marry Howard—challenged him, and had nigh killed him but for——"

"Hark! do you not hear the tramp of horse?" interrupted Mervyn.

"It is the rumbling of distant thunder," said Aurora, trembling and clinging to Mervyn; but the latter and Claude both looked eagerly out in the direction of London. It was now pitch dark, but by the frequent glare of lightning, and the continued hollow echo on the turf, they became but too well aware that they were pursued by a party of horsemen, though at a considerable distance, for they appeared as if on the verge of the vast heath.

"This will never do—they will soon overtake this old lumbering mail we are in!" exclaimed Claude. "I like to feel the free turf beneath my feet; let us mount, Master Mervyn, and do you take the lady before you, and we can leave the coach behind crawling after us, to deceive the enemy."

Aurora eagerly intimated her assent to this proposal, and Mervyn, perceiving that it was the only course which remained, short of a downright battle, hastily complied. Ducas and one of his highwaymen resigned their steeds at

the request of their masters, and though Alice was in great tremor at being left, Mervyn mounted her young mistress before him, and with a mixture of delight and terror felt her arm encircle his neck, while he clasped his arm round her waist to keep her firmly in her awkward seat. The cavalcade now proceeded at a brisk rate over the heath ; it consisted of two leaders, and of those highwaymen whose horses were able to keep pace. Claude, however, looked back from time to time, and announced that they were still pursued, for he distinctly saw the gleam of armour, and the clatter of hoofs on the stony road was very audible. Unluckily, too, the horses showed signs of flagging, and despite the vigorous use of the spur, the pursuers were obviously gaining on them.

Neither Mervyn nor Claude ventured to hint this fact even to one another, and their hopes were now somewhat reanimated by perceiving, in the hollow of a steep hill which they were descending, a little scattered hamlet which seemed to offer some chance of protection. The low thatched roofs and quiet cottages, each bosomed in its apple orchard and rustic garden of cabbages and marigolds, seemed to sleep in " spite o' thunder " ; the little village church and churchyard rose in the midst, and a broad brawling brook, crossed by a bridge formed of a single oak, whose living trunk still shot out verdant suckers, flowed between our riders and that once invariable accompaniment of an English village—the village green. It was a wide open sward, flanked irregularly by the churchyard, and by the straggling cottages of those who, after their calm and innocent lives had attained an answering close, slept there with ancestors whose chronicles were only a rude record on a grave-stone, or the babbling tongue of some old grandmother by her winter fire. A great deal of wormwood grew on the green, and its rich scent seemed to meet the travellers like the welcome of a friend.

Towards this village they now pressed with renewed vigour, and Mervyn's horse was dashing through the stream in gallant style, when a sudden flash of lightning showed the animal its own shadow in the waters, and, with a snort of terror and a wild bristling of the mane, it rolled back on its haunches, and made a furious attempt to back out of the stream. In vain did Mervyn plunge his spurs into its reeking sides ; and now the voices of the pursuers were

distinctly heard, and a rushing mass appeared on the summit of the acclivity.

"Stand for it, lads!" cried the gallant Claude. "On, Master Mervyn, we will make you five minutes good!"

As he spoke, urged by one desperate plunge of his bloody spur, Mervyn's horse sprang forward; but it was too late, the whole mass of pursuers was on them; and such was the eagerness of the chase, that they galloped past, whirling their horses round to head the fugitives. Mervyn merely discerned that they were soldiers, and drawing his sword, he rushed on, determined to force himself a passage, or perish in the attempt. He heard Blood's voice shouting, "No firing, look to the girl!" and suddenly a sword flashed at his head. He parried the stroke, and mad with terror, lest Aurora should be hurt in the *mêlée*, struck furiously on; but his assailant gave no inch of way, and a ready weapon met him at every stroke. All this took place in almost utter darkness, and Aurora's shrieks seemed to wring the very sky, without summoning any assistance, though many of the villagers appeared at their lattices in great consternation.

This kind of conflict lasted but a few moments; Mervyn's antagonist seemed merely waiting till he had exhausted his strength in these vain blows, and now in turn pressed upon him. Mervyn felt that his strength was failing fast, and his terror for Aurora's safety hindered him from acting with energy; but he continued backing his horse, and sustaining his guard with difficulty against the increasing fury of his assailant. In fact, his fate seemed inevitable, when suddenly a stream of lightning blazed over the combatants, and he recognised that his antagonist was Blood himself, and the latter that his was Mervyn!

This recognition seemed to produce the effect of a spell upon the colonel: he grew pale as ashes, his horse reared back, and his arm hung wavering in the air, as if paralysed. But a more than mortal fury seemed to seize Mervyn, and gave a giant's strength to his exhausted nerves: urging the horse madly on his antagonist, and yelling "Murderer!" in a tone to appal the stoutest heart, he struck the colonel a blow which laid him prostrate, and shivered his own weapon. The effort exhausted his strength and that of his horse also, and it fell head foremost, with Mervyn and his senseless mistress in his arms. His head struck with violence against

a stone, and he became insensible. He recovered only to find himself fastened on a horse behind a soldier, and surrounded by a guard, riding slowly on the road to London.

CHAPTER LIV

A ROYAL PLOT

THE grey light of morning was breaking over the towers and spires and the majestic river of London, when a coach drove slowly and wearicdly up to the gates of Aumerle House. It stopped, and two figures alighted; one a powerful man, wrapped in a riding cloak, and with his head bound up; the other a youthful woman, on whose beautiful features sat a ghastly paleness and an expression of resolute hopelessness, which showed like a statue of despair carved by some Grecian sculptor. They ascended a flight of stairs into an apartment, in which, busily engaged over some papers by the light of waning lamps, sat four figures—three men and a woman.

"It is he—it is Blood," exclaimed one of the former, starting up, "and the lovely little fugitive herself."

"You seem horribly gashed, sir. What has become of the leader—of Mervyn, in brief?" exclaimed the countess, for it was she.

"Woman, you have broken our compact—you have falsely cheated me," replied Blood, fiercely. "Your son is in Newgate."

"Ha! Lloyd has done his part of the task well, then," exclaimed the foremost cavalier, who, to the dreamy eye of Aurora, seemed the King, as the other two seemed to be Lord Howard and the chief justice, Jeffreys. "I thank my Lady Howard for giving me that hint to send him as your coadjutor, or it seems you had scarce permitted my warrant to hold good as far as Seven Oaks."

"I confess, my liege, I would have prevented this dreadful woman from committing the murder of her son," exclaimed Blood.

"My son!" shrieked the countess, clasping her hands wildly. "Your Majesty hears. They call this traitor and

condemned villain my son. I cannot, I will not endure such slander."

"Peace, countess; it matters nothing whose son he be, were he my own," said Charles. "Mistress Sydney, hear me. I am grieved that you should have so far disgraced yourself as to fly with a notorious thief and traitor, and thereby tarnish your reputation for ever; but Providence, in a remarkable manner, revealed your projects, and set one thief to catch another; for Oates's complaint about his stolen canonicals set us on what scent our fox lay. Now, madam, methinks the whirligig has gone fairly round. Your father and this Mervyn are utterly in my power—a word from you saves and loads them with wealth and honours, or consigns them both to the block."

"To the block then let them go!" said Aurora, in a faint but determined tone. "A thousand and a thousand times will they bless me for the preference. But I will not survive them. I am Sydney's daughter, and Aumerle's wife in all but the name, and I will die so."

"Put Mervyn's name into my Rye House list," said Charles, turning a livid look of wrath to Lord Howard.

"My liege, I pray you, do not force that man's blood upon me too," said Howard.

"Then live to be a beggar, thou drivelling falterer!" shouted Lady Howard. "Live to be stripped of wealth, and honour, and life, for want of one poor word; for, sire, yes, I do acknowledge before the King that Mervyn is my son, Aumerle's lawful heir, and now refuse to gibbet him if you dare."

Howard stared aghast at his countess, and even the King was struck dumb with surprise.

"Why, 'tis true, he was concerned in the Rye House matter," said Howard, taking a deep gulp of breath, "but, faith, I am deeper in the mud than he in the mire."

"You have our word for aught that concerns yourself, Howard," said Charles, eagerly. "It shall be so!" he continued, after a moment's pause. "Yes, one blow shall rid you of an insolent pretender, and me of a false traitor and rival. Farewell, Mistress Sydney; farewell for ever! I have broken your chains at length, and never, never will we meet again."

"Yes, we shall meet again, sire," said Aurora, with a wild smile. "We shall meet again, King Charles, at that bar

where the oppressor and the oppressed are equal, and a vain title shall not protect tyranny and murder from their just punishment."

"Farewell till then, madam!" replied Charles, furiously. "Meanwhile, this earth at least is ours."

And he strode rapidly towards the door, followed by all the personages of the scene except Aurora, who threw herself with a sigh of exhaustion into a chair. She was now alone, and she sat for some time apparently in a profound reverie, yet without a single distinct idea, unconsciously gazing at the pale green light of the dawning day playing on the waters of the Thames below. A deep sigh, or rather groan, behind startled her sense, but scarcely her reasoning faculties, and she looked round vacantly at the intruder. It was Lord Howard.

"Dear Aurora, rouse yourself; it is only one of your poorest worshippers!" he said, with a passionate look, which seemed to strike on some chord of memory, and awaken the half-paralysed machinery. "Look, to this dark and terrible night what a most lovely morn has followed! And even in the midst of this storm which rages around us both, a glorious rainbow of hope arises. Hear me, Aurora: you may yet save your father and Mervyn, foil the tyrant at his own weapons, and make one happy who has long loved you dearer than life!"

"What means Lord Howard?" she said, with a glance full of tumult and horror of thought.

"I am the only witness against them both," replied Howard, hurriedly. "If I were dead or in France to-morrow, what evidence is there against them? Fly, then, with me, and in some distant land, far from the tyrant's power——" He paused, overcome by the withering eye which met his. Surprise and unspeakable scorn, mingled with a wild sense of the ludicrous—strange as it may appear—shone in its lightning. There was almost a minute's pause.

"And is my Lady Howard to be of the party?" she said at last, with a slight hysteric laugh.

"Lady Howard! I hate her! She is a savage beast, and no woman!" said Howard, vehemently. "I hate her! She has too long held me in her iron thralls. The woman that can pursue her only child with such mortal hatred is none. Talk not to me of Lady Howard! I abhor her worse than the pestilence!"

"And me you love? This offer is to Aurora Sydney?" said the lady, looking at him with an amazement which defied all the powers of expression even of her resplendent eye.

"Love you!" echoed Howard, looking carefully round the gallery, "why, I adore you, loveliest of women!" And throwing himself on his knees, he clutched her hands, as he exclaimed, "Fly with me to Italy or Ireland; where you are, 'tis Paradise! Dearest creature! I am wholly thine, and have been from the first moment I beheld you!"

"Lord Howard," said Aurora deliberately, "I have long deemed you a villain, but knew not till now that you were a fool."

"Nor I," said a voice, which made them both start, and raising the tapestry, a figure stalked in which almost froze Aurora to look upon. It was the countess, but changed as if by some supernatural agency. Upright, rigid, and pale as a corpse, she stood there, her countenance working horribly with a demoniac confusion of passions, and her white lips wavering with a smile so ghastly that human eye could scarcely bear to look upon it. Both Howard and Aurora started up, and seemed held by a spell of fear.

"Do you recollect me, Mistress Sydney?" said the countess, at last. "My Lord Howard seems to have forgotten me; I am still Eleanor d'Aumerle, my lord."

"Lady Howard—I—that is—on my honour, Lady Howard, I was but earnestly pressing the King's suit!" stammered Howard.

"Save yourself further perjury; I overheard the whole conversation, my lord," interrupted the countess, in a tone of supernatural calm; "I overheard all. O God, this is just indeed! and have I sacrificed all for this?"

"I spoke but in madness; I said I know not what!" said Howard, confusedly. "I beseech you, Lady Howard, glare not at me with those wild eyes. I am weary of your harsh trammels. I loved you once, but—but—who can love a tigress athirst for the blood of her own offspring?"

"I will remove this complaint—I will yield to the feeling which hath so often tugged at my heart!" said the countess, wildly. "Go, you are a beggar! the heir of Aumerle shall sit once more in his father's halls, and this lady-love of yours shall be his bride."

"Never, madam! since you make me desperate, you

shall learn what desperation can do!" said Howard, fiercely. "I will bring your son's head to the block, or lay my own in its stead—I swear it!" and he rushed out of the apartment.

"Reginald, thy blood is avenged!" gasped the wretched countess, and, clasping her hands wildly to Heaven, she fell at full length on the floor.

CHAPTER LV

THE TRIAL OF SYDNEY

A ROYAL reign of terror now commenced, arrest followed arrest: the noble Russell bled on the scaffold, Essex committed suicide, and on the insufficient evidence which had condemned Russell, Sydney was put on his trial by the award of the grand jury. He attempted to raise objections to the indictment, but Jeffreys overruled all. It was even rumoured that his daughter was accused of treasonable knowledge of the conspiracy, and it was certain that she was held in a kind of imprisonment in Aumerle House, none of her relations but her uncle, Lord Leicester, being allowed to see her.

The only hope which the friends of Sydney now entertained was the fact that only one witness—Howard of Eskricke—could depose to any overt act of treason, and the law imperatively required two witnesses. In the midst of these speculations, however, men were astounded with tidings that Mervyn had volunteered to bear witness against his former friend and benefactor, and that his evidence was that on which the crown lawyers depended for implicating Sydney in the conspiracy of the Rye House! At first this report met with general incredulity, but when the circumstances under which he had first appeared on the eventful stage of the Popish Plot were remembered, people shook their heads and knew not what to think. Altogether the trial was looked forward to with the most intense interest, and was the sole engrossing topic of all men's conversation.

At length the day arrived—that day the brightest and saddest of the great martyrology of English liberty—the

21st of November, 1683. It was about nine o'clock on the morning of that memorable day that Mervyn entered Westminster Hall, escorted by a strong guard, and as a witness—for in no other character had he apparently any office there. The hall was crowded almost to the groined rafters of the immense building. Neither judges nor accused were, however, arrived, and Mervyn was for a time the undivided object of the public curiosity. All that could be remarked in him was the deadly whiteness of his complexion and the extraordinary brilliancy of his eyes. He sat down between his halberdiers, in a box reserved for the witnesses, seemingly indifferent to the buzz of abhorrence which greeted his *entrée*, and took a deliberate survey of the spectacle.

Many a face did he recognise with which he had been familiar in his court days, seeming to look on with great satisfaction; among these was Chiffinch, who gave him a malicious nod. But few of the popular party were present, and the chief of these was the Lord Cavendish, and a very different personage—Dr. Oates. That reverend man was wedged in among a great throng of the rabble, but his palmy days were evidently over; he looked haggard and ragged, gaping with his enormous mouth, while dark signs of agitation streamed down his face.

Averting his eyes with disgust from this wretch, the looks of Mervyn rested for a moment on the peculiar countenance of a lawyer, who was apparently busied among some papers at the judge's table, where he remained during the trial. In spite of his huge grey wig and chalked eyebrows, Mervyn felt positive that he recognised the features of the King—of Charles himself. But again his attention was attracted by the figure of Lady Howard, seated among a bevy of high-born ladies in a gallery above. She wore a black visor, and seemed to sit wrapt in her own dark and unearthly thoughts, while the court dames about her prattled and exchanged coquetries with the gallants who surrounded them.

This leisurely survey was terminated by the entrance of the judges, rustling in ermine and crimson robes. Foremost of these, strutting like a turkey-cock, marched the chief justice. Immediately afterwards the pikesmen of the Tower appeared at the great entrance of the hall, and at first only the tall figure of Sydney was discerned. He was dressed in his usual sober style, and his countenance was perfectly serene, without either dejection or defiance in its

expression. Several gentlemen of the popular party were around him, but suddenly the pikesmen opened their ranks, making a kind of passage to the bar, and, with a thrill of indescribable emotion, Mervyn perceived that a female form leaned upon Sydney's arm. It was Aurora.

She was dressed in white, except that she wore a hood and mantle of black velvet, which hung in graceful folds around her perfect form. It was fastened at the waist with a silver girdle, which Mervyn remembered to have given her. The heroic blood of her great race seemed to animate her, for she moved with a firm step, and seemed scarcely to need the fond encouragement which her father continued to give her till she reached the bar. She curtsied gracefully to the judges, who looked at her in much surprise, and stood calmly while the proclamation for the information was read. Mervyn could not conjecture the meaning of this scene until Sydney requested of the court that he might have pen, ink, and paper, which were granted. He then, in a calm tone, added, "My lords, I have to ask your indulgence for another request. It is that you will allow my daughter to write for me. She would not be behind my Lady Russell in duty and love, and, being accustomed to pen at my dictation, will be all the help I shall need."

"We consent, though we would spare the lady such trouble and pain," said Jeffreys, respectfully. "Usher, set Mistress Sydney a chair and bureau, and God speed her task, and bring it to a happy issue."

Aurora bowed meekly.

Some few preliminaries were gone through, the bureau and chair made their appearance at the bar, and Aurora seated herself to her task with a stifled sigh, which was yet audible all over the court, so deep and general was the silence. She drew off her glove and threw back her hood, revealing a countenance cold and tranquil as a beautiful corpse, the eyelids purple with incessant weeping, the lips white and parted. Indeed, she looked so like marble that Mervyn's blood ran cold in his veins. He tried in vain to catch her eye to reassure her with the desperate meaning of his, but she never raised it from the paper.

The proclamation was now made, in a court deathly still, and Sydney addressed the judges, renewing his application for a copy of the indictment, and producing the statute of Edward III., by which it was assigned to all accused

persons. But Jeffreys sovereignly disposed of this objection, citing the decision of the judges in Sir H. Vane's case. In vain did Sydney argue that judges are but interpreters, not makers of laws,—the chief justice lost what little temper he ever had, and ordered the arraignment to proceed, declaring that they could not spend their time in discourses to captivate the people. And so a judge's rule set aside a law of the three estates of the realm—by no means for the first nor last time. The jury were then empanelled, after a few challenges, and an observer might have drawn an evil augury to Sydney from the gay dress and courtly wigs of the jurors.

Doblen, the junior crown counsel, opened the pleas. His speech was merely a repetition of the indictment. Sir Robert Sawyer, the attorney-general, then rose. He laid down the order in which the crown meant to produce its evidence. In the first place they should prove a general design for raising a rebellion ; in the next the share which the prisoner had in it. They should prove that he was one of the council of six ; that various consultations were held ; the treasonable nature of those consultations ; the sending of Aaron Smith into Scotland. A traitorous libel, which it pleased the prisoner to call a Treatise on Government, would next be proved to be his work, and the abominable principles entertained in it would prove how much his heart and soul were in this matchless treason. "Finally," said the attorney in an impressive and solemn tone, "it has pleased Heaven to place in our hands, though at the eleventh hour, undoubted proofs of this gentleman's participation in the bloody treason of the Rye House. One of the conspirators, moved doubtless by remorse for so matchless an offence (when I say matchless, I endeavour, as becomes one who had his share in the framing of that most clement and merciful Act of Oblivion—to forget the martyrdom of his late most sacred wronged Majesty), moved by remorse, I say, for so matchless an offence, for he hath no hope of mercy held out, nor is any intended that I wot of—one of the conspirators will appear at your bar, to bear witness against the prisoner in that matter, the which, though not conclusive in law, will add its moral weight to the certain overt proofs we shall produce."

Mervyn saw that Aurora raised her eyes, with a broken-hearted expression, to the lawyer's face, but they sank again instantly.

"Gentlemen," concluded the attorney-general, "if we prove these matters to you, I doubt not you will do right to the King and kingdom, and show your abhorrence of those republican principles, which, if put in practice, will not only destroy the King, but the best monarchy in the world."

The solicitor-general, Finch, now called the evidence, in the order which his leader had marked out. In vain Sydney protested against the injustice of proving a general charge, and demanded that the evidence against himself only should be heard. Jeffreys overruled his objection, and cited, with bitterness, the similar course pursued against the victims of the Popish Plot.

The first witness examined was West, who merely gave a general account of Shaftesbury's conspiracy, its disappointment, and the projects which followed, abandoned for various causes. Then came Colonel Rumsey, who now appeared in the character he had probably played all along, of a treacherous spy. He detailed the meetings at Sheppard's and Hampden's, especially that one in which the council of six determined on its operations. Thus far all seemed to go swimmingly for the crown.

Keeling, the vintner, was next examined, whose evidence, though vague and unsatisfactory, went to support the general fact of a conspiracy.

"We charge him with conspiring," said Sir Robert, rather apologetically, "and there must be confederates in the case. Now we come to the prisoner. We will call my Lord Howard, who was one of the persons that did consult."

The crier repeated the name in a strong nasal tone, and the nobleman in question appeared. All eyes were fixed upon him with a great variety of expressions.

He was dressed in all his usual sumptuousness, but his face was pale, and his eyes bloodshot with drink—indeed, he looked as if scarcely recovered from some excessive debauch. He had the effrontery to raise his hat to Aurora, after he had bowed to the court, but she took no notice of him, continuing calmly to write, as she had done through all the proceedings hitherto. Sydney looked at him and sighed deeply, but said not a word.

Howard gave his evidence in a full uninterrupted flow of words, the self-possession of which was almost marvellous. He commenced his narrative from the failure of Shaftesbury's plan, to the forming of the cabal, as he called it,

detailing the various consults with such malicious glosses, interpretation, and exaggerations as marked the rancour of the renegade. Mervyn he described as the life, the arch-conspirator in the Rye House Plot, though he insinuated that Sydney and the six used him as their instrument in the whole. He asserted, with a laugh of bitter scorn, that Sydney had even cajoled him with hopes of giving him his daughter in marriage—him !—the base son of a notorious bravo, a traitor who had in turn betrayed every party, even the best of kings and masters. Mervyn looked at Aurora, to see if she showed any emotion as she wrote these words, but the white hand journeyed on, and the marble visage showed still as perfectly calm as death. Howard seemed to increase in violence and bitterness from this circumstance, till Jeffreys himself admonished him that Master Mervyn was not then upon his trial. Howard then ceased.

"Will you ask him any questions, Mr. Sydney?" said the chief justice, who had been noting down with great diligence.

"I have no questions to ask him," said Sydney, mournfully.

"Silence—you know the proverb," said the attorney, maliciously.

Two witnesses were then produced, who proved that certain Scottish gentlemen came up to London under pretext of making a purchase in Carolina, who absconded on the discovery of the plot. These men were alleged to be commissioners to concert a rebellion.

"We have done with this piece of our evidence," said Sir Robert. "Now to show that while this emissary was in Scotland, at the same time the colonel (which will be another overt act of treason) was writing a treasonable pamphlet. I will call you the witnesses. It is all of his own writings."

Sir Philip Lloyd then described the seizure of the papers: three witnesses proved the handwriting, Sydney only slightly objecting that similitude of hands could be no proof. The attorney then directed a clerk to read certain passages which he pointed out—passages which breathed the very sublime of republicanism, such as it appeared in the grand theories of Milton—an august reverie of universal virtue, happiness, and liberty. The main arguments, and which he inculcated with all the vigour of his athletic logic,

were—that the source of all just power is the people; that the people are judges in their own case, inasmuch as it concerns only themselves; that the general revolt of a nation can never be called a rebellion; and, finally, he denied that the power of calling and dissolving parliament was in the King,—a necessary dogma at a time when, if a parliament met at all, it must meet in spite of the King.

"So much we shall make use of," said Sir Robert, placidly. "If the colonel please to have any part read to explain it, he may."

The sheets were then handed over to Sydney.

"I do not know what use to make of it—I can read it," said he, tranquilly laying them down.

"Ay, no doubt of it, better than any man here," said Jeffreys, with a bantering smile. "Fix on any part that you have a mind to have read."

"I do not know what to say to it—to read it in pieces thus," replied Sydney.

"I perceive," said Jeffreys, labouring to entrap the prisoner—"I perceive you have disposed them under certain heads: what heads would you have read?"

"My lord, let him give an account that did it," replied Sydney, drily.

"My lord, we will not delay Colonel Sydney from entering on his defence," said the attorney, "only we have this piece of evidence to give further. One of his accomplices was my Lord Russell: we will give in evidence his conviction."

The record of Lord Russell's conviction was then read, and Sydney listened to it with some slight marks of emotion; but he smiled encouragingly at Aurora, observing that she grew white almost to lividness."

"But, my lord," again urged Sydney, "I desire to know upon what statute I am indicted."

"My lord, I will give as plain an answer," replied Sir Robert. "You are indicted upon the old statute of 25 Edward III."

"They have proved a paper found in my study, of Caligula and Nero," said Sydney; "that is compassing the death of the King, is it?"

"That I shall tell the jury," replied Jeffreys. "The point in law you are to take from the court, gentlemen; whether there be fact sufficient, that is your duty to consider."

Sydney took some papers from his daughter, and, glancing at them, put them down with a troubled look. Sir Robert was again speaking.

"My lord," he said, "I am about to close the case for his Majesty—and not only for his Majesty, but for every man of you that live under his blessed, mild, and most sacred government, and with the testimony of him of whom I spoke, which, inasmuch as it substantiates the fact of the colonel's adhesion to the Rye House conspiracy, which is as it were the marrow of the whole, I may well style the keystone of this great arch of proof, which I have cemented so together that neither the torrents of party violence nor the slow majestic waves of history shall in any way shake it. Call Master Mervyn Blood, *alias* Aumerle, as he something arrogantly bastardiseth himself at times."

Aurora started, and her father pressed her hand in silence; the summons was repeated by the crier, but ere it ceased Mervyn was at the bar. "I am here, my lord—no bastard, but the lawful heir of the late Earl Aumerle," he said, in a tone of perfect composure, and somehow its deadly fixedness of purpose chilled the sudden uproar which arose into a breathless silence of expectation.

"This is no time for us, Master Mervyn, to investigate your claims, real or pretended," said Jeffreys, with cajoling softness. "Speak the truth in God's name, whatever your own may be."

"I shall, my lord, and His lightnings descend upon my head if I speak falsely but a word," said Mervyn, with some elevation of tone. "My lord, I am told the grand jury have returned a true bill against me, and I desire to plead guilty to the conspiracy laid to my charge."

"Let his plea be recorded," said Jeffreys, eagerly. "But do not let any false hope entangle you, sir; his Majesty is determined that justice shall take its course in all these matters, and especially in your case, lest men should say the officers of his justice bought your testimony at the high price of a traitorous life being spared."

"It is what I expect—what I implore—what I demand!" said Mervyn. "Death, death—nothing but death! I will seal the truth of my testimony with my blood."

There was an energy and desperate determination in his manner, which struck awe even into Jeffreys himself.

"Well then, sir," he said, "proceed. God forbid I should oppose the disburthening of your unhappy conscience."

Mervyn drew up his tall figure, and folded his arms sedately, and his noble features never seemed so instinct with beauty as now, when fired with the magnanimous madness which irradiated them. He looked around. He saw the Lady Howard gazing fiercely at him; he saw the mysterious lawyer, whom he had previously noticed, glaring with malicious joy in his face—and he turned from the myriad accusing eyes around with a smile of bitter scorn, and met the mournful eye of Sydney. There was no reproach in it—it was sorrow, manly, serene—but more affecting than the wildest outbursts could have been. Mervyn seemed to gather strength from the general injustice, and he glanced at Aurora. Their eyes met. She was reclining back in her chair, but a light flame-coloured blush wavered on her cheek, as if the spirit within blushed, rather than the flesh without. What a world of meaning was in that glance!—the love, the grief, the suffering of ages, the million reproaches of as many violated trusts, an immortality of anguish and despair. Had he indeed come there to play the villanous part for which all present gave him credit, that look must have smote his heart more keenly than a dagger.

He began in a clear, calm, melancholy tone, and as he did so he saw that Aurora resumed her pen, looking like the angel of the fiery record—so beautiful, serene, and passionless. He entreated his lordship's pardon for a short digression while he briefly stated the circumstances of his first connection with Sydney—it was necessary, he said, to the story. He gave a rapid sketch of his early life—by what machinations Oates brought him over to England—the manner in which Sydney saved his life. Sydney's counsel would have interrupted this as irrelevant, but Jeffreys silenced them; the tide was turned, and everything against the popish plot and its contrivers was acceptable to the sitters in high places.

"I have never been believed," said Mervyn at this point; "but I have said it in all places, and before all persons—when it might benefit and when it might destroy me—Oates was the real murderer of Sir Edmundbury Godfrey."

There was a general but suppressed murmur, and a voice from the crowd sobbed, "O Loard, defend Thy saints!"

"Who speaks there?—I know thine accursed tones, murderer!" exclaimed Mervyn, fiercely. "But the voice of blood will no longer be choked. Come forth, thou man of blood, and I will wring the truth from thy black heart!"

"You go too far, captain; the King cannot be served thus," said Jeffreys, kindly. "Keep to your present subject; I doubt me not we shall have to do with the Lord's sinner at some other day."

Mervyn became calm again; he related how Sydney saved his life, and seemed to dwell on all his goodness, as if to exaggerate the magnitude of his subsequent fall. He described Sydney's calm and literary life, his generosity, his noble sentiments on all occasions, in a language of panegyric which apparently pleased Jeffreys, for he thought it was only a rhetorical artifice to heighten the effect of what was to follow. His imagination seemed to kindle as he advanced, and he burst into one of the most eloquent eulogiums that had ever been heard within the walls of Westminster, but which barely did justice to the illustrious subject. The chief justice began to show tokens of surprise and displeasure.

"Well, well, Master Mervyn," he interrupted, "I hope there is no one so bad but he hath his better qualities, and Mr. Sydney hath doubtless many matching his great rank; but we must not have the jury stuffed with fulsome speeches, and our time wasted. Speak only what is near to the accusation."

"My lord, all that I have said points to the matter at issue," said Mervyn; "it was by these great and noble qualities that Colonel Sydney won from me that implicit faith and confidence which hath brought us both here. He first taught me that the people of England are born free; that their rights are inalienable; that he who endeavours to deprive them of their exercise is a tyrant; and that it is lawful to bring tyrants to justice."

"Speak not in such generalities, sir," said Jeffreys; "say plainly—meant he that it was lawful to assassinate or otherwise slay a king?"

"To bring tyrants to justice!" thundered Mervyn, till the hall rang again.

"And he considered his present most gracious Majesty

a tyrant?" interposed the attorney-general. "Let the witness take his own way, my lord; fair and softly goes far."

"Sydney defined a tyrant to be a man who ruled without consent of the governed, or in a manner which they did not approve," replied Mervyn. "I pretend not to say what deductions he drew from these premises, but I drew these—mark ye all, I in my particular person—that Charles II. is an atrocious tyrant, and that it is lawful to slay him like a wild beast, though it were more becoming the justice of a great nation to bring him to the block by deliberate process of law, as it was done to the late Charles, his father."

"We see in what school this unhappy youth hath been educate," said Sir Robert, compassionately. "And thus seasoned, no marvel you were ready prepared to aid and abet in the desperate plot to murder his Majesty (whom heaven preserve) at the Rye House."

"I had a tempter, my lord, indeed!" replied Mervyn. "None but the fiend ever fell without one—a false, a villanous tempter! But I was seasoned, as you say—well seasoned—with insufferable wrongs. All the world has heard them. I was wrongfully accused, imprisoned, stripped of all but my vengeance, by those who knew my innocence. Falsely or truly, I believed that his Majesty was my chief wronger and oppressor, and the wrongs my country suffered, too, seemed to me to sanctify the arm of private vengeance."

"But the tempter—the tempter, sir?" exclaimed Jeffreys.

"There were but three of us engaged in the Rye House conspiracy," continued Mervyn, quietly—"but three of us:—you know the plot, the plan, the failure."

"It was sufficiently expounded at my Lord Russell's trial," said the chief justice.

"I know nothing on what grounds my Lord Russell was convicted, being in a dungeon this many a day," said Mervyn. "But I do hope his blood was not shed in that cause, for he was as innocent of it as any saint in heaven."

"Pish!—we are not here to try my Lord Russell, nor my Lord Russell's ghost," said Jeffreys, peevishly. "Speak to the point at issue—tell these gentlemen what project was formed by this *imperium in imperio*, this second council of *three*, and how its barbarous plans were to be perfected."

Mervyn detailed the circumstances of the plot, precisely as we have narrated them, but as yet he named no names; he spoke only of the council of three; but the part played by Howard all present silently ascribed to Sydney.

"Now, gentlemen, did you ever hear of a horrider plot, talk as they will of the popishers?" exclaimed Jeffreys. "So you for your own part, Master Mervyn, were desirous rather to secure the King's person than to slay him then and there? I must say that showed some better nature in you. But this tempter, whom you name not, was desirous to glut his traitorous thirst in his Majesty's most sacred blood?"

"But what hath all this to do with me, my lord?" said Sydney, much agitated. "Surely this witness cannot mean to accuse me; I never heard of any such plot till my dear friend, the Lord Russell, was executed for it."

"Ay, truly, in cases like these of life and death, we must not deal in blindman's buff," said Jeffreys, wrinkling his terrible eyes. "State clearly and by name who were these three monstrous conspirators, and in especial him whom you still style the Tempter."

"I myself was one—Colonel Rumbold—'tis no harm to say it, since he hath escaped—was another," said Mervyn; "and the third——" he was interrupted by a fearful shriek from Aurora, who, clasping her hands, hung over the bar in agony.

"And the third," he continued, amidst the most deathly stillness—"the third—the tempter, who now like the fiend accuseth his miserable victims, was the Lord Howard of Eskricke!"

There was a full minute of profound silence.

"Villain! what means this—art thou mad?" exclaimed Jeffreys, in his most tremendous voice, and half rising in his judgment-seat. "Darest thou palter with the King's justice?"

"Justice!" shouted Mervyn. "Did he wield the thunder, I would defy and scorn him, as I do thee, thou bloodthirsty judge! Tyrants! I have deceived you. I am here to die, but it shall be with the truth on my lips. Sydney is innocent of all part or share or knowledge in the Rye House conspiracy. Howard, Rumbold, and I were the sole planners, the sole confidants, the sole executors of

that glorious attempt. And now do your worst. I defy the worst that man can do."

There was another pause of profound astonishment. It was broken by a shout of applause from the immense audience, which all Jeffreys' furious gestures and yells could not for some moments suppress.

"My son, I knew thou couldst not mean to betray me," said Sydney, with a smile of benignant tenderness, and a triumphant glance at the reanimated countenance of his daughter, which shone with an expression of celestial joy.

"The man is mad," exclaimed Sir Robert, in the first moments of restored silence. "His crimes, wounds, and imprisonment have crazed him."

"No, no, he is not mad—he is more knave than fool," said Jeffreys, blackening with rage. "He hath fairly deceived us, but himself more. He hath confessed what we might have had some difficulty in proving. Clerk, enter his plea of guilty, and remove him to his former place till we have done with Mr. Sydney. It was well, Sir Robert, that you put small stress on this witness's evidence. Your charge, methinks, hath legs enough of its own to stand on."

"Gentlemen of the jury, you have heard the truth," exclaimed Mervyn, as they removed him. "If you condemn the prisoner, his blood be upon you and your children's heads for ever and for ever."

"Gag him if he will not be silent," exclaimed the chief justice.

"Will not this gap in the state close till it has swallowed up all that is noblest in it?" said Sydney. "Oh, Rome, Rome! boast of thy Curtius as thou wilt, here is one whose glory outdazzles his."

It was some time before the excitement of this extraordinary scene subsided, and Aurora resumed her occupation. It was wonderful that, although her lover's fate was sealed by this outburst, she seemed restored by some magic to life and happiness. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes sparkled, there was animation, courage, defiance in the very grace of her beautiful form, in every gesture, in the haughty smile on her lip.

Sydney examined a note which his counsel handed over to him, and began his defence. He denied that he had any right to take notice of the papers laid to his charge. It was impossible to prove that they were his writing; his hand

might be counterfeited—a very common artifice in that intriguing age. He then alleged the law of Edward III., by which he could not be indicted, much less tried and condemned, without the evidence of two witnesses to each branch of the indictment. Here was only one—the Lord Howard. He then proceeded to expose the inconsistencies and improbabilities of Howard's narrative, which, indeed, existed in the conspiracy itself, from the great variety of plans and cross-plans pursued by the different ramifications of plotters. Sydney had had but one motive, but one course of action, and he had not the least idea by what an infinite variety of threads it was crossed. This part of his defence was evidently the composition of a lawyer. It abounded in legal subtleties, far-fetched illustrations, clenching arguments on little points; but it emerged finally on the broad ground that, as there was but one witness, and the law required two to an indictment of treason, he was not obliged in any manner to plead to it.

"This is a point of fact whether there be two witnesses," said Jeffreys. "I tell you beforehand one witness is not enough."

"Why, then, there is my Lord Howard, and not another," said Sydney.

"Nay, do not make these inferences," replied Jeffreys. "I will tell the jury, if there be not two witnesses as the law requires in this matter, they ought to acquit you."

"You confound me—I cannot stir!" said Sydney, vehemently. "You talk of a conspiracy; what is a conspiracy to kill the King? Are there any more witnesses than one for levying of war?"

"Pray do not deceive yourself," replied Jeffreys; "you must not think the court and you intend to enter into a dialogue. Answer to the fact; if there be not sufficient fact, the jury will acquit you."

Thus hardly pressed, and still condemned to fight with shadows, Sydney took a new tack of defence, by assailing the credit of the solitary witness which *had* appeared. He exposed his inconsistencies, his rhetorical artifice, his confused evidence, which distinguished what no man said or did, but created a general impression which might be distributed at any man's fancy. Jeffreys pretended to encourage him in this proceeding; he termed it relevant to attack the credit of a witness if he could.

"I have this to say concerning my Lord Howard," continued Sydney, "he hath accused himself of divers treasons, and I do not hear that he has his pardon for any; he is under the terror of those treasons, and the punishment for them; he hath shown himself to be under that terror: he hath said he could not get his pardon until he had done some other jobs—till he was past that drudgery of swearing—that is, my lord, that having incurred the penalty of high treason, he would get his own indemnity by destroying others. This, by the law of God and man, I think, destroys a man's testimony. Besides, my lord, he is my debtor; he owes me a considerable sum of money I lent him in time of his great necessity; he made some covenants with me for the payment of that money, which he hath broken; and when his mortgage was forfeited, and I might take the advantage the law gives me, he found out a way to have me laid up in the Tower. He is a very subtle man; at my Lord Russell's trial he carried his knife, he said, between the paring and the apple; and so this is a point of great nicety and cunning, at one time to get his own pardon, and at the same time to save his money. Another thing, my lord, is, that when I was a prisoner, he came to my house, and spoke with my servant, and said how sorry he was that I should be brought in danger upon this account of the plot, and that it was but a sham; and that he was confident, if I had known anything, I should have told him. He hath said something of this before; I have several witnesses to prove both. He was desirous to go further, and he would not only pay my debt by his testimony against me, but he would have got my plate and other goods from me into his possession, and he desired my man, as a place of trust, to put them in his hands. And the next news was that there was a warrant against my Lord Russell and me. But then, my lord, he made other affirmations in the presence of God, that I was innocent in his opinion, and was confident of it, for if I had known anything of it I would have told it."

After this burst of indignant feeling, Sydney looked again at his legal notes, and apparently resumed the line of argument which they chalked out for him. All the ingenious resources of defence were exhausted by the able lawyers who had drawn up his plea; every argument of reason, authority, and even ridicule, charged in succession

the mass of disorderly unconnected facts and perjuries which Howard had produced. The decisions of former judges, refusing the similitude of hands, seemed to destroy the evidence of the alleged libel. Sydney, however, got into speaking of Filmer's work, which his own was written to refute, and the zeal of the author soon appeared in the withering invective which he launched at his adversary. But Jeffreys recalled him abruptly, and, after some wrangling, impatiently desired him to produce his witnesses, if he had any.

Sydney, finding it in vain to contend with the power and obstinacy of his judge, called the Earl of Anglesey, who bore testimony to the expressions which Howard had used relative to Sydney's innocence of the plot. The Earl of Clare bore a similar evidence, commenting with great bitterness on the delator's ingratitude to a man who had obliged him in many instances. Mr. Philip Howard, a gentleman of the same family as the accuser, also witnessed against him, and with the indignation of an honourable mind indignant at the disgrace brought on their common name. The celebrated Burnet; Sydney's steward, Ducas; the Lord Paget; Mr. Edward Howard; and several witnesses of inferior rank were called, who testified to the facts of the Lord Howard's constant denial of the conspiracy, his assertions of Sydney's innocence, and frequent expressions of complaint at being obliged to purchase his own pardon at the sacrifice of others. There was no necessity to prove the mortgage—he hastily acknowledged that himself.

Sydney's counsel now produced a witness in the form of an old grisly Jew, whom several in court instantly recognised as the alchemist Elkanah.

"And what have you to say, my fine master?" said Jeffreys, watching the snaky glittering of the man's eye with the interest of a congenial nature.

"This only have I to say," replied the Jew, tremulously, "that if your lordship pleases to show me any of these sheets of paper, I will undertake to imitate them in a little time, that you shall not know which is which. 'Tis the easiest hand that ever I saw in my life."

"You did not write these, Elkanah?" said Sir Robert, tossing over the papers impatiently.

"No; but I will do so in a very little time, if you pleash," replied the alchemist.

"Have you any more witnesses?" interrupted Jeffreys in a wrathful voice.

"No, my lord."

"Then address yourself to the jury," he replied vehemently.

And Sydney did address himself to the jury, with the same calmness and dignity of manner which he had preserved throughout the trial. His speech was a model of argumentative eloquence. But what availed eloquence or innocence at the corrupt tribunal before which he stood? He ceased at length, conquered rather by exhaustion of frame than of argument. Marks of approbation from portions of the audience continually escaped, but the terrific Jeffreys easily suppressed them.

He then sat down beside his daughter, whose deadly paleness had now returned. She endeavoured to look at him smilingly and hopefully, but the effort was vain, and tears gushed heavily to her eyes.

The solicitor-general replied in an elaborate speech, and Sydney wished afterwards to add a few remarks, but the chief justice would not allow him, alleging that his time was past. He then commenced that remarkable charge to the jury which, but that he himself has left similar examples, would stand alone in the annals of legal injustice. With what emotions this address was listened to may be imagined; a profound, almost deathly, silence reigned. Sydney's countenance was almost the only one in court which betrayed no signs of agitation. Aurora's eye and her whole soul were fixed on the judge with a fixedness and intensity of thought that barred out all external influences. Much curiosity was entertained relative to the judge's interpretation of the statute whereby two witnesses were required, and which seemed to be a fatal want in the whole process. This question was soon put at rest.

Jeffreys began his charge by an able exposition of the points at issue, the manner in which they should be regarded, his own duties, and those of the jurors. With apparent impartiality he enumerated the laws on the subject of high treason; but suddenly he launched forth that celebrated decision which might alone have made his name infamous among the false interpreters of the law of England. "I am also to tell you," he said, with peculiar emphasis on every word, "that, in point of law, it is not only the opinion

of us here, but the opinion of them that sat before us, and the opinion of all the judges of England, and within the memory of many of you, that, although there be two witnesses required to prove a man guilty of high treason, yet it is *not* necessary there should be two witnesses to the same thing at one time. But if two witnesses prove two several facts that have a tendency to the same treason, they are two witnesses sufficient to convict any man of high treason."

These words struck a death-blow to the hopes of Sydney, but still he was unmoved, save that he looked compassionately at his daughter. Jeffreys proceeded to defend the conduct of the crown prosecutors, by assimilating it to that pursued by the popular party against the popish plotters. He spoke indignantly, as if the majesty of justice were affronted by doubts thrown on the existence of a plot for which many had already bled on the scaffold. Despite of Mervyn's overwhelming evidence, he artfully amalgamated and dovetailed the Rye House conspiracy into all the ramifications of the popular party. Mervyn's testimony he declared unworthy of credit, as that of a desperate wretch, who, like the dying wasp, endeavoured to leave its sting in the crusher's hand. He summed up the evidence altogether against Sydney and his witnesses, and drew from those of his antagonists a narrative of the plot, to which he seemed to pledge the weight of his judicial authority.

All the arguments in Sydney's favour, one by one, disappeared under the crushing march of his (so-called) *judge!* But, as if aware of the instability of his decision concerning witnesses, the chief justice, after reiterating it, declared that, even if the prisoner's objection was good, there were two witnesses—one indeed, dumb, yet speaking with a mighty voice—being pen and ink. There was a general murmur of curiosity, but when the judge pronounced that this second witness was the book which Sydney had written, a book containing "all the malice, and revenge, and treason that mankind can be guilty of," men looked at each other in mute terror. He reminded the courtly jury of the bitter times of the late rebellion, and declared that without vigour and unanimity similar scenes were approaching. "Next, I must tell you, gentlemen," he concluded this part of his summary with bloodthirsty injustice, "upon, I think, a less testimony, an

indictment was preferred against the late Lord Russell, and he was thereupon convicted and executed, of which the record has been brought. This is the evidence for the King."

He next proceeded to demolish Sydney's various objections. The fabric which his lawyer's skill had raised, rapidly fell, brick by brick, beneath the overbearing hand of his authority. "So that, on one side," he concluded, piously raising his eye, a trick he had learned from his old masters, the Puritans, "God forbid but we should be careful of men's lives, so, on the other side, God forbid that flourishes and varnish should come to endanger the life of the King and the destruction of the government. But, gentlemen, we are not to anticipate you in matters of fact. I have, according to my memory, recapitulated the matter given in evidence. It remains purely in you, now, to say whether you believe, upon the whole matter, that the prisoner is guilty of the high treason whereof he is indicted."

"Gentlemen, it is fit you have our opinion," said Mr. Justice Withins, unwilling to be defrauded of his share of everlasting infamy. "In all the points of law we concur with my lord chief justice: Colonel Sydney says, here is a mighty conspiracy, but there is nothing comes of it: who must we thank for that? None but the Almighty Providence: one of themselves being troubled in conscience, and came to discover it; had not Keeling discovered it, God knows whether we might have been alive at this day."

After this appeal *ad homines*, the jury withdrew.

"And now, my dearest child, for the firmness which you promised me," said Sydney, turning to his daughter. "Remember you are a Sydney!"

She looked at him, and her white lips moved, but uttered no sound. Sydney stooped and kissed her marble brow with dignified tenderness. He then began speaking in an undertone, but with perfect calmness, to his counsel and the gentlemen of his acquaintance who crowded round. Mervyn, who had hitherto looked on as imperturbable as a statue, now observed the strange lawyer whisper to Jeffreys, who, under pretext of taking some refreshment, retired. He returned in a few minutes, something flushed, probably with a draught of strong waters, his favourite

potation, and observed in a mild tone, "The jury are like to occupy the best part of an hour in their talk, so, Master Serjeant, make some small room at the bar, and let us see this rare witness of ours, who hath so amply testified against himself. Let another twelve be sworn, and we will dispatch his business."

The orders of Jeffreys were always obeyed with rapidity. A new jury soon occupied the box of those in debate, and Mervyn's guards transferred him to the bar at which sat Sydney and his daughter. The former embraced him with extreme emotion; the latter put her hand mechanically in his, and a visible shudder ran over her whole frame. Mervyn blessed God that she seemed scarcely sensible of what was going on, and took his stand, leaning on the bar with proud and dignified composure.

"Prisoner!" said Jeffreys, in a terrific tone, "you stand indicted of high treason, and your plea of guilty is recorded; but, for the satisfaction of the jury, let it be read again."

"You may spare yourself that trouble, my lord," said Mervyn, "as also any attempt to frighten me with big looks and noisy words. I am past fear, my lord. I plead guilty to your indictment, for in that guilt, as you call it, do I place my chief hopes of being remembered with applause in my country's history. I am guilty of conspiring to dethrone the tyrant, Charles II., and to restore their liberty to the English people."

"Read his confession, clerk," said Jeffreys, with imperturbable determination.

While this form was going through, Mervyn felt his sleeve plucked from behind, and looking round, he saw, with surprise and horror, the form of Colonel Blood, half hidden by a pillar. He looked as pale as a corpse, but his eyes had a wild wolf-like glare.

"Mervyn!" he whispered, "there is still another die in the box—demand the ordeal by battle; 'tis an ancient law unrepealed."

Mervyn turned as if from a fiend, but the words worked strangely in his mind, and assimilated well with the reckless state of his feelings. When, therefore, Jeffreys hurriedly began to pronounce sentence on him, for Sydney's jury were now ready with their verdict, he interrupted him. "My lord, I have this to say why judgment should not

be passed on me," he exclaimed. "By an ancient law, never repealed, it is left to the accused to vindicate themselves in single battle against their accusers. Your lordship is fond of these ancient worm-eaten laws, and will not deny me battle with my accuser, whoever he may be, which I now demand to the death, as witness my glove."

"Then fight it out with yourself, for you are your own sole accuser," said Jeffreys, with a loud laugh, in which none joined. "Why, the man is mad—let us see him buffet himself—light, light!"

A few torches, hastily kindled, threw a dark and lugubrious illumination on the scene, and produced an effect of peculiar solemnity and gloom. The pale face of Mervyn, glaring with passion; the passive form of Aurora, with her marble features bathed in a cold dew; the calm, majestic attitude of Sydney; the immense masses of gazing faces, which had all gradually sunk into dark twilight—all came suddenly into full relief. Jeffreys renewed his sentencing, when he suddenly recollected that he had not his black cap on, and he turned with a sharp rebuke to the officer who ought to have had it ready—when a muttering murmur ran around. "*The* jury, *the* jury!" In an instant there was a profound silence throughout the hall. The jury appeared, with their foreman at the head, preceded by an officer with links. But this illumination was rendered unnecessary by a cataract of rich golden light, which inundated the whole wall, and lighted up its minutest carving—probably a sudden burst out of the cloudy sunset.

"Well, gentlemen, well, what is your verdict?" exclaimed the chief justice. There was a general leaning forward in the audience, and suppressed exclamations in female tones.

"My lord, we find the prisoner—Guilty," replied the foreman, in a tremulous tone.

There was a moment of deathly silence; not a word, not a movement, not a breath, throughout the immense mass. Then, as if released from the wand of some enchanter, a general murmur was heard; some looked at Sydney, and a smile seemed to quiver on his lips; others at Aurora, and she seemed in nowise disturbed from her trance of agony, save that her tears were flowing unheeded down her white cheeks.

"Speak up like men, then—the prisoner is guilty!" said Jeffreys, with a look of savage triumph. "Mr. Attorney, will you move anything?"

"My lord, the prisoner at the bar is convicted of high treason," said Sir Robert. "I demand judgment against him."

"Algernon Sydney, hold up thy hand," said the clerk of the court. Sydney obeyed. And the usual question was put if he had anything to say why judgment of death should not be passed against him.

"My lord, I humbly conceive I have had no trial," said Sydney. "I was to be tried by my country; I did not find my country in the jury that tried me; there were some of them that were not freeholders. I think, my lord, there is neither law nor precedent of any man that has been tried upon an indictment by a jury who were not entirely composed of freeholders. Thus, I humbly conceive that I have had no trial at all, and, if I have had no trial, there can be no judgment."

Jeffreys abruptly overruled this objection, and another which Sydney's counsel put into his hand, relating to the omission of one of the King's titles in the indictment. Many more arguments he produced, as if in vain hope of exhausting the injustice of his judge, who at length proceeded in a bullying manner to pass sentence. But Sydney again interrupted him.

"I must appeal to God and the world," exclaimed he; "I am not heard."

"Appeal to whom you will," replied the chief justice. "I could wish with all my heart, instead of appealing to the world as though you had received something extremely hard in your case, that you would appeal to the great God of heaven, and consider the guilt you have contracted by the great offence you have committed. I could wish that, as a gentleman and a Christian, you would consider under what particular obligations you lie to that gracious King who hath done so much for you. I should have thought it would have wrought in you such a temper of mind as to have turned the rest of your life into a generous acknowledgment of his bounty and mercy. Mr. Sydney, you are a gentleman of quality, and need no counsel from me; if I could give you any, my charity to your immortal soul would provoke me to it. I pray

God season this affliction to you. There remains nothing with the court but to pronounce that judgment which is expected and the law requires; therefore, the judgment of the court is—*That you be carried hence*——"

"My lord, it is a beastly and an abominable formula!" interrupted Sydney. "Pray you, let my daughter retire. Ah, God, she is dead!"

This exclamation he uttered when, turning round, he saw his daughter supported by Mervyn in her chair, her head lying back, her eyes closed, and her whole appearance calm as death.

"No, 'tis only a swoon—would to God she were dead!" groaned Mervyn.

"Remove her, and let her be looked after," said Jeffreys. "I am sorry for the lady; there are those waiting without who have the care of her."

Sydney raised his senseless child in his arms, and for a moment nature overcame the heroic stoicism of his manner. His countenance grew convulsed with emotion, and a single choked sob burst from his heart as he resigned her powerless weight to Lady Howard's woman, who now appeared. Her uncle, the Earl of Leicester, and several other gentlemen, assisted in bearing her out, and then the unmoved Jeffreys pronounced the barbarous sentence of the law. He threw in, as if by make-weight, Mervyn's sentence—but it was *to be hanged only*.

"And the God of infinite mercy have mercy on your souls!" he charitably concluded.

"Then, O God! O God!" exclaimed Sydney, "I beseech Thee to sanctify these sufferings unto us, and impute not our blood to the country, nor the city through which we are to be drawn; let no inquisition be made for it; but if any, and the shedding of blood which is innocent, must be revenged, let the weight of it fall only upon those that maliciously prosecute us for righteousness' sake."

"I pray God work in you a temper fit to go into the other world," said Jeffreys, "for I see you are not fit for this."

"My lord, feel my pulse, and see if I am disordered," said Sydney, extending his hand. "I bless God, I never was in better temper than I am now."

"I demand my sentence according to the statute," exclaimed Mervyn, wildly. "I will not be hanged!"

"Is not that good enough for your gentility?" said Jeffreys, with a bitter sneer. "Remove the prisoners—we are done."

"My lord, I have one request to make," said Sydney. "It is that my daughter be given to the guardianship of her uncle. I cannot suffer her in the inhuman hands of my enemies."

"There is matter against her before the council—she is better in the hands of Lady Howard than the dungeons of the Tower," said Jeffreys, rising impatiently.

"Farewell, then, dear and worthy son," said Sydney, embracing Mervyn. "Farewell!—if we meet again on earth it must be on the scaffold; but I doubt not in a brief space we shall be together in a better place."

"The scaffold, then, be our field of glory, father," said Mervyn. "I have followed your steps on earth, and I shall follow them to heaven."

They embraced once more with solemn tenderness, and the guards removed them in different directions.

CHAPTER LVI

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

It was the morning following the eventful day we have just described, when a figure enveloped in a long cloak was seen gliding in at the portals of Aumerle House, in which but few now entered. He mounted the stairs, pushing the page aside who would have announced him, and made his way into the apartment we have formerly described. Things had reassumed their usual orderly magnificence; a bright fire blazed in the chimney, and near it sat Lady Howard in her wonted state. She had some gold network in her hand, but had forgotten to ply it, and seemed buried in a dark reverie.

"Well, is it you, Mr. Blood?" she said carelessly, turning at the sound of footsteps.

"It is, madam," replied the muffled figure.

"You seem in bad spirits, colonel," said the countess. "What ails you? Lack you gold? There—help yourself—here are my keys, and there are my coffers."

"I come not for gold—I have perchance what will serve my time," replied Blood, in a croaking voice. "This wound in my side, given by the hand of the heir of Aumerle, is deadly. I want what is better than all the mines of Mexico—a moment's peace of mind. Woman, you have broken our compact!—he dies, and by your means."

"Well, he dies," said the countess, calmly.

"But he shall not die!—I will proclaim you rather," exclaimed Blood.

"Do your worst, colonel—I defy you!" she replied, mockingly.

"Fatal woman! you have snapped the last links of my chain!" said Blood, violently.

"You have too long held me the slave of your threats, sir," said the countess. "They pall upon me now, and lack the taste of terror. Do your worst, Master Blood—I tell you I defy you!"

"'Tis well, then!" said the colonel, clenching his teeth as if in resolute purpose. "Madam, I bear the King's commands to speak with Mistress Sydney."

"To what intent?" said the countess. "But I deny you not; she is the King's prisoner, not mine. I marvel you have not yet noted her—she is there."

She waved her hand at a figure reclining on a couch, in a recess of a window, but so motionless that Blood had not perceived it. It was Aurora: she was as pale as snow, her eyes sunk and closed, while tears streamed as if unconsciously down her cheeks.

"Lady," said Blood, in a mild tone, "dry your tears; a better day has dawned: I bring you good news."

"You bring then word that I am to die with them," she said, with wild eagerness.

"You shall all live—all be happy yet!" said Blood. "It depends on yourself, lady, whether they live or die like slaughtered oxen under the bloody axe! Read this letter—it will explain all—it is from the King."

"The King!" she exclaimed vacantly, and mechanically taking the paper. "Alack, mine eyes are all on fire, or else the writing burns. 'Tis so—Charles R."

She seemed to reanimate from her stupor of grief, and

began reading, but the contents appeared to puzzle her. She apparently read them over and over again ; at length, however, the meaning seemed to burst upon her, and she covered her face in an agony of tears and sobs.

"Weep, weep, lady ; tears relieve the overcharged heart," said Blood. "Would to God that I could weep too ! His Majesty is touched with pity for your sufferings, but on no other conditions will he brave the fury of his brother, and the discontent of the cavaliers."

"My father's life spared—only to be confined in the Tower—a pardon to be granted in a year," said Aurora, in a tone of amazed incredulity. "Mervyn pardoned on the instant—his birth acknowledged—ostensibly married to me—and all the price of one poor wretch's shame. Oh, what a value hath villany in this world, and virtue none ! "

"Believe it not, Mistress Sydney," said Lady Howard. "York will never consent to any of the exclusion men being spared : your father will be beheaded at last, like Raleigh, or murdered in his dungeon, like——"

"Like your husband, Aumerle," interrupted Aurora, with a flash of her former spirit. "But 'tis all in vain. Oh, Colonel Blood, my father would never live at such a ransom—Mervyn would detest, loathe me—I cannot—I will not. I will die with them—my heart will not take long breaking."

"You give them, then, to the block," exclaimed Blood. "Think, lady ; think of your father's grey hairs ; think you see them bathed and clotted in his gore ; think you hear the whirr of the axe as it severs that neck round which you have so often clung. He hath been both father and mother to you ; she who should have shared his task died young ; yet you have never missed a mother's love. Think ere it be too late. Oh, it will madden you when you gaze on his bloody hacked corpse to think that a word, a single word, might have saved him."

"I cannot—I cannot—what must I do ? " gasped Aurora. "Cannot the King content him with my life ? I will gladly die by any tormenting death ; but must I die of shame ? "

"Beware, Aurora Sydney ; put no faith in Charles's promises," said Lady Howard, vehemently. "He hath deceived all men and broken all pledges—he will dishonour you and murder your father too."

"'Tis false!" exclaimed Blood. "Do but consent and in an hour I will bring you Mervyn's pardon; promise only to—to go to-morrow and present a petition at Whitehall for your father's life, and not alone shall it be granted on the instant, but you are thenceforth omnipotent in England."

"Let him pardon my father first, Mervyn and I can die together," she exclaimed, wildly.

"And therefore the King will not do so," said Blood.

"What shall I do? My God, my God!" shrieked Aurora, wildly pressing her brows. "I am maddening. Would that I were mad as the veriest Bedlamite."

"Write but two words—say you consent."

"Could I but see my father—could I but know that he will live at such a price," said she, distractedly. "Oh, do but let me see him; but he would rather die a million million deaths."

"Ay, rather the perpetual death of Prometheus!" said Lady Howard.

"Oh, countess, countess, have mercy!" said Aurora. "I cannot have my father butchered. Oh, he did love me so! I must not, I will not! If it be a crime, Heaven will forgive it sooner than the selfish virtue which would give them both to the block."

"Live, then, a mark for shame to point at through all ages!" shouted the countess.

"It well becomes thee, thou pure wife and tender mother, to threaten this," said Blood, with slow bitterness.

"Tigress! thou hast never known what human feelings are, or thou couldst not," said Aurora, with a sudden and strange brilliancy kindling in her eye. "If I were but sure that the King meant truth by me—bring me this pardon, and I will consent."

"Joy, joy! I will soon bring you good news, dearest lady," said Blood, as he rushed out of the room.

In truth a few hours only elapsed ere the colonel made his reappearance, though the rapid night of an English November was darkening all things as he entered the mansion. He found Aurora alone in the same apartment, in almost the same attitude, save that she was now perfectly tearless with long weeping.

"Victory, victory!" he exclaimed. "Here is Mervyn's pardon, an order for his release, an acknowledgment of

his birth, dated only two days forward on that which should be his day of execution."

"Can this be true? Lady Howard has been out ever since you left me, and treachery is doubtless at work," said Aurora.

"Let her do her worst," exclaimed Blood; "be at Whitehall to-morrow at noonday, and you are empress of all England."

Aurora laughed—a bitter, wild, jangling laugh, which made Blood shudder and stare at her with much alarm.

"Nay, it is all well, excellently well," she said, hurriedly, "but I must needs laugh to think; I must save my father, you know. The King shall sign his pardon, ay, and set him as free as a wood-thrush, ere he poisons my lips with one breath of his. Yet he cannot think I mean to play him false if I put myself wholly in his power, eh, Blood? and shall I not be so, unless *death* come to the rescue?"

"It is true, lady," replied Blood; "but at least I have redeemed my soul, by saving the heir of the man whom——"

"But, Blood, I must be calm; my brain leaps with agony," said Aurora, pressing her hands to her brows. "They tell me that one Elkanah, a mediciner in the Mall, deals in a marvellous drug to calm the raging blood of madness. Here is a physician's rescript; get me this drug, in the name of mercy! Here is gold for him—a purse—let him pay himself."

Blood took the paper, and saw, with a surprise which he had some difficulty in concealing, that it was directed to his old friend the alchemist. He promised obedience, however, with a readiness which might at any other time have excited her suspicions, but, in the present perturbed state of her mind, Aurora took no heed. She fell into a kind of sleepiness and stupor of grief, which Blood thought it best not to disturb, and accordingly took his departure, and proceeded immediately to Elkanah, induced as well by curiosity as the intense pain which he felt in his still green wound; the Jew, as usual, being his mediciner.

Blood threaded his way through the by-streets which led to Elkanah's shop, and with the familiarity of old acquaintance, entered the chemist's sanctum, unannounced. He was surprised and somewhat startled to find the old man engaged in sharpening the edge of a bright dagger, which seemed fastened by a spring to a richly-mounted

pistol. Elkanah started up with an air of guilty confusion as he heard the step, and looked at Blood, with the weapon quivering in his hand, for some moments ere he felt assured who it was.

"Well, Elkanah, what do you there?" said Blood, taking the dagger in his hand, and suddenly starting as if his hand were stung.

"But polishing this quaint Italian weapon for a young cavalier of the court—anything for money!" said the apothecary, confusedly.

"Then it hath been stolen, or else it is the exactest counterpart that ever was," said Blood.

"Stolen!—whence?"

"From the Tower," replied the colonel, and Elkanah's swarthy countenance grew of a leaden colour.

"There hath been no great encouragement to robberies in the Tower, colonel," he replied tartly.

"We will not quarrel about that matter, Elkanah," replied Blood. "Here—I have brought you fuel for your furnace—gold, man, gold! Doth the fool Bethel bleed as freely as ever?"

"Alack, no, he is on the verge of bankruptcy and madness—the ungrateful beast," replied Elkanah, with a sudden brightness of enthusiasm overspreading his sallow face. "And yet, colonel, would you think it?—I am on the very verge of the great projection—smile as you will—I swear 'tis true. I lack but one poor thousand pounds to buy a diamond of a peculiar carat, and the projection is complete, and I shall live for ever. But what am I to do for these moidores?"

"Give me this drug," said the colonel, handing the paper given him by Aurora.

The apothecary perused it with an air of indifference, and proceeded to rummage in a cabinet of carefully-locked drugs for the one in question.

"And whom are you weary of, colonel?" he said jocosely, as he adjusted his scales, "that you intend to give them so deadly a pinch of ease?"

"Deadly?" repeated Blood.

"Marry, call you not arsenic a good poison, and so refined that but to breathe it were death to an ox?" said the apothecary.

"Is it so?" said Blood, with assumed indifference.

"Well, I want not so deadly a dust; give me some of your precious anodynes—some sleepy essence that shall counterfeit death, or at least bring repose to the throbbing brain of madness. Canst not?"

"Certes," replied the apothecary. "Here is a drug which shall make a man sleep while you run a skewer down his marrow—ha! ha! it shall seem death for good twelve hours—long enough to bury a man alive, if such be thy intent."

"It will do," replied Blood. "And now tent my wound, Elkanah; it gnaws like the undying worm. Thy pharmacy hath hitherto but heightened the smart."

A ghastly smile overspread the Hebrew's face.

"Look that thou dost not play me false, Jew," said Blood, observing this with some undefined suspicion stealing into his mind.

Elkanah giggled again hysterically, and proceeded to dress the wound, the mouth of which welled out a dark green fluid. With a man of Blood's impatience this was soon performed, the drug carefully folded, and once more he was in the open air. He left the parcel at Aumerle House, and then resolved to go to Newgate, to relieve Mervyn from the agonising apprehensions which he conceived must weigh upon his mind.

He knocked, and a turnkey readily admitted him; but in answer to his request, he was informed that the prisoner was taken to the Tower, by a warrant of the council, about an hour before. Blood looked at the man for some minutes incredulously, and a variety of circumstances rushed into his mind, which excited a strange and diabolical suspicion.

"Know you to what part of the fortress he was taken?" he said.

"Yes, very well, by the same token that it was the 'partment in which Lord Aumerle shot himself, as I remember; for I was a serving-man there once—the Bloody Tower they call it," replied the jailer.

"The Bloody Tower!" repeated the colonel. "Then I have no time to lose."

He rushed out of the precincts of Newgate, called a hackney coach, and drove rapidly to the Tower. The gates were, however, closed, the drawbridge raised, and the only reply which Blood could get to his earnest entreaties

to see the lieutenant, was an order to come the next morning. Breathing vengeance and fury, Blood at last retired to a neighbouring alehouse, to ruminate on what was to be feared, and what was to be done.

CHAPTER LVII

THE BLOODY TOWER

The excitement and agony of his trial once over, Mervyn relapsed into that state of quiet desperation which is usually remarked in men of his ardent character, when the storm of passion is over. He expected the tidings of death with little emotion, and it was only when his thoughts reverted to Aurora, and the deplorable state in which she would be left, that they regained the venom of their sting. But it was not without some surprise that he learned he was to be taken to the Tower, for greater security till the execution, especially as it was late in the evening when the order arrived. But it was obeyed instantly, and he was taken in a coach to St. Katharine's Gate, where he was received by the Lieutenant of the Tower, and escorted to his apartments with great civility.

It was not without some degree of melancholy surprise that Mervyn found they were leading him up the stairs of the Bloody Tower. Sir John probably understood the expression of his prisoner's countenance, as he apologised for the intended accommodation, by alleging that he had received express orders, which he dared not disobey, to lodge him in that particular suite.

"It matters little where I lodge for the remainder of my life, Sir John," replied Mervyn.

"I am sorry to agree with you, sir," replied the lieutenant, apparently pleased with his prisoner's submission. "I have ordered every arrangement likely to diminish your discomforts, as good fires and good wine, and good old Mr. Edwards will be your seneschal."

So saying, he motioned to a very old man, with long white hair, and much bowed by years, who stood at the top of the stairs. Mervyn immediately recognised the keeper

of the regalia. The old man bowed reverently, and threw his torchlight forward, to light him up the murky staircase.

Mervyn soon found himself in the state-chamber, whose gloomy vastness was lighted, or rather darkened, by a single lamp. The high-barred window showed a square patch of starry sky, and faintly illumined the tapestry on the walls, and crossing the yellow lamplight, gave a peculiarly ghastly glare to the figures on it. Some signs of comfort, however, redeemed the general gloom and musty neglect of the apartment; a table was spread handsomely with silver plate, and two or three kinds of wine in tankards; and a bright wood fire blazed in the chimney, without dissipating the musty smell and dank atmosphere of the long disused chambers.

Mervyn walked up and down, restless as a panther first turned into its cage, while the other two were busied in the bed-room, lighting another fire, and shaking up the huge couch; and he marked with a moment's attention the river view, visible from the bed-room window, until by degrees he grew more calm.

"Do you remember me, Master Edwards?" he said, observing that the old man, on his return into the chamber, looked at him very earnestly.

"Marry, no, sir," replied Edwards; "but it set me on thinking, seeing how like you look to the great man that slept here last—many a year agone—the great Catholic earl, Aumerle."

"How long ago is it?" said Mervyn.

"A matter of some twenty years, if my old memory tallies," replied Edwards. "He murdered himself in that bed—though I should not tell your honour so—I could show the very weapon. Where is it, Andrew?—Oh, Master Chiffinch took it away when he was last here, for his Majesty's curiosities."

"I have seen the day you would not have allowed that the earl did that dismal deed himself, Master Edwards," said Mervyn, with strong emotion.

"Indeed?" said Edwards, with much curiosity. "Your honour will excuse my boldness, but I can't help thinking you are the man of the boy that came here with Blood when he tried to steal the crown."

"You are right: I was to have been your daughter-in-law," said Mervyn, with a melancholy smile.

"Well, sir, you saved my life then; I would I could do so by yours now," replied the old man.

"An angel could scarce do that," said Mervyn, looking round with a slight shudder. "But why, I marvel, have they put me here? were there no other chambers in which to stow me, Edwards, till I fill my narrow one? These chambers have a desolate aspect; but your fire makes it look more cheerful. Is it much as the earl left it?"

"Scarce a chair out of place," said the old man, thoughtfully. "The silver crucifix is gone, indeed, but that is his desk where he sat writing the night of his death. The bedroom, too, is just the same. The velvet belonged to him, I think—ay, indeed, it has his coronet upon it—poor gentleman."

"Do you recollect the night of the mur—suicide?" said Mervyn.

"Ay, well enough, and the beautiful little boy that Claude Duval brought to see him," said Edward; "and the quarrel with that beast, Blood—the blow! Oh, I can recollect things a score years ago, though I forget those of yesterday."

"I was that child, Edwards," said Mervyn, musing as if in a deeper stratum of memory. "And it seems to me as if I recollected something of a tall pale man, with a noble countenance, dressed in black. But had he a bunch of poppies on his breast?"

"A bunch of poppies!" repeated Edwards, with an aghast look. "When he was dead it might seem so! Well, God forgive us all!—yet blood that is fairly shed will wash out," continued the superstitious old man. "But yonder is my lord's, as crimson in the boards to this day as it is in the soul of his murderer."

"But I at least shall die on the scaffold, in the fair daylight, and in a glorious cause," said Mervyn, earnestly interrupting the garrulous old man.

"We are the King's officers, and must not hear you say so," said the old keeper, with a smile. "But I hear you are to be hanged, sir, and 'tis a pity, if you come of such good blood."

"They will not even let me die like a gentleman," said Mervyn, bitterly.

"Heaven forbid I should put such thoughts in your head, but this place is enough to drive any man—to cheat

the hangman," said Edwards, significantly. "I was thinking, too, of poor Claude Duval, who is to swing to-morrow at Tyburn, for doing on the highway what honest men do in their closets."

"Is Claude Duval then taken?" exclaimed Mervyn.

"Why, sir, he was taken with you," said Edwards, much surprised.

"Indeed, indeed? I had forgotten," said Mervyn, musingly. "But what's this you say about murders? No matter. What is under these covers? Come, you shall stay and sup with me."

"I have orders to attend you, sir, on account of the knives," said Edwards, quite seriously.

"Well, there is enough for us all," said Mervyn. "I am a good republican, or death will soon make me one; so remove the covers, gentlemen, and draw chairs."

Edwards declined, however, in the most positive terms, alleging it was against all regulations; but he sat down at the prisoner's earnest request, and the warders stood behind his chair while he ate.

At length Mervyn was left alone, and he listened with a heavy heart to the doors swinging on their hinges, and the bolts rolling into their sockets. Albeit seated at a cheerful fire, with a tankard of claret at hand, his meditations were not likely to be of an exhilarating character. A prisoner, under sentence of death, it seemed as if he could now take a survey of the events of his life, and pass sentence with the impartiality of an historian. Recollection called up recollection, and, as if in a panorama, the scenes of his short but eventful career passed in review before his imagination. He thought of all that he was, and contrasted it painfully with all that he might have been. But for the crimes of a few individuals, how happily he might have lived! From his cradle prosperity would have waited upon him, distinction courted him, honour rewarded his least effort. The exquisite being whom his soul worshipped, even in its desolation, would have been his, amidst all the enjoyments of wealth, and power, and grandeur. Then arose the terrific contrast. His scorned youth, his dangerous manhood, his lost love, his approaching death of terrible agony and still more terrible ignominy. It was the first time he had imaged Death in his full and ghastly actuality; hitherto he had thought of it only in the distance, as a chance that might

happen—a sudden and a glorious blow. But to be hanged, throttled, suffocated—the idea was too horrible!

He felt his neck, he pressed it, he tried to imagine the sensation—it was agonising. He recollected Godfrey's death-look, and from murder to murder, he bethought him of his father's dismal end in that very chamber. Then he reasoned whether or not it was a suicide; he sipped his claret deliberately, and weighed the motives which might have determined his father to the act. Somehow or another, all these arguments, as he shaped them, seemed to have equal intensity *with regard to himself*. He asked himself, why should a man fear to anticipate his doom by a few short hours?—but then was it not a crime? Certainly not like that of a man who has his volition in full play. Then he thought that Aurora would know that he had died by the hangman—and he looked around, not as one who has formed a resolution, but as one who seeks reasons to form it.

He looked at the fire burning dully down into its white ashes; but humanity shrank back appalled from the terrible idea which crossed him, that death lurked even in those glowing embers. Then his eye fell musingly on the huge iron bars of the window, and he recollected to have heard of a man who hung himself in Newgate at a similar place—and that was only to escape standing in the pillory. But again the ghastly face of Godfrey seemed to glare at him, and he tried to recollect some other mode of suicide less terrible. Still it was all vague—merely speculation.

He now thought of the Earl of Essex, and of the weapon he used; but there was none such at hand. And then his thoughts reverted to his unhappy father. It chanced that the moonlight streamed at the moment through the barred window on the desk, and by some wonderful freak of association the whole scene arose almost palpably to the eye of sense. He distinctly remembered the features and dress of his father, his jewels of the garter, his fine eyes, the melancholy sweetness of his smile. He sat for some time lost in this reverie, and a superstitious ague began to creep over him. His hair hung heavy with drops of agitation; in vain he sipped the wine, stirred the fire, and endeavoured to reason on the folly of his fears. Why should he dread a species of being which he was soon to pass into himself? Was not he too a spirit of an immortal essence,

though cased in material clay? Then he fell to reasoning on death.

What was it, this death? Was it a sleep—merely the absence, not the privation, of all the powers and senses called life? What kind of passage must the thinking particle pass through, whatever it may be, ere it stood naked of its clay? The brain, the eyes, bursting in suffocation, what then succeeded? Again he held his neck till his eyes filled with sparks, and the veins of his head panted; insensibility must soon ensue if the sensation had been continued—what then? Would the thinking atom survive that crush and inundation of agonies, or would it become again the nothing that it was?

A thousand different speculations which he had heard in the course of his diversified career, now occurred to him. The subtleties of the schools; the acute logical, yet unconvincing theology of the Jesuits; the lively atheism of the courtiers of Charles II., all seemed to lose power and meaning in the actual presence of the great Œdipus—Death. But could he not put the great question now, and force an answer? And then so strangely did imagination work, he almost envied his father his dagger—pistol—so rapid and so sure. He endeavoured to shape out the earl's tragedy, and followed him step by step, by a train of almost mathematical deductions, in the work of blood and death. Suddenly he felt an irresistible desire to go into the bed-chamber where he had breathed his last. He took the light and walked towards the door, but as he approached its threshold a slight sound, it may be an imaginary one, caused him to look shudderingly back, and his eye fell upon a large mirror opposite, and so ghastly pale, and like what he remembered of the earl, was his own image there, that he stood for a moment horror-struck as if he beheld a phantom. Then he smiled dismally at his own terrors, and after hesitating another moment at the fatal door, entered.

The appearance of the bed-chamber was not such as to dispel the visions which haunted him. A low fire burned in the huge chimney, and shed a dark glare on the red damask curtains, the faded tapestry, and naked floor. He placed the candle down, and seated himself in an arm-chair near the fire, that he might deliberately comprehend his own feelings in regard to his actual situation. A vague idea of escape suddenly crossed his mind as he looked at the vast

chimney; he glanced up; there was a hole scarcely wider than a quart bottle in the vast stones of the masonry. His eye reverted in despair, and fell upon a broad stain in the floor, and as if fascinated, he followed its least meander to a distance of several yards from the bed. "Oh, my father, my father!" he exclaimed aloud, "thou who didst prefer death to dishonour—shall the last of thine ancient blood die by the hangman?"

As he spoke, his gaze was attracted by the glitter of a silver tag which, according to the fashion of the day, fastened his doublet, and the thought occurred to him that by its instrumentality he might baffle the vengeance of the tyrant—that, like the victims of the Roman Nero, he might open his veins and quietly bleed to death. This idea fascinated him, and his resolve was instantly matured. He took a strange pleasure in the thought that he would go to the very spot where his unhappy father had perished, and there like him elude the fangs of his enemies. He arose, took the tag from his breast, and having ascertained that the point readily pierced the skin of his hand, he went towards the bed. But suddenly a form met his eye—whether the offspring of delirious fancy, or one of those inexplicable and tremendous phenomena which cross our mysterious being, and are incapable of all rational solution while the secrets of death remain such—but the form of his father, exactly as he had last seen him, save for a grisly wound in his left side, stood there before him! His garb was the same as he had seen it in life—black velvet glittering with jet ornaments—but his face was of the awful paleness of the tomb, and a mournful tenderness seemed to struggle with the rigidity of death.

The figure stood perfectly motionless between Mervyn and the couch, and as the prisoner gazed, his hair rose upright on his head, his teeth clenched, and his whole frame seemed paralysed. In a few moments the figure grew indistinct, and finally waved into air. He seemed then to recover breathing and life, and staggered back to his chair.

A few moments' rally persuaded him what he had seen was merely an illusion of his excited organs, and the dreadful longing after death again assailed him, like that which men feel to leap when gazing down a precipice. He rose again, and looked towards the couch which he destined for that

of his eternal rest; but the form was there again, distinct, clear—and this time waving its hand earnestly away. Mervyn's resolve once more faded, and terror rendered him motionless; the tag dropped from his hand, the room seemed to whirl round, a million lights danced in his eyes, and he sank insensible on the floor.

When he awoke from his trance, his brain seemed shooting with the keenest darts of pain, and he had scarcely strength to lift himself up. He sat down in his chair with a dreadful conviction that he was maddening, but the hope and desire of self-murder had vanished. He felt that if he could weep it would be an unspeakable relief, but not a drop came to his burning lids. He endeavoured to pray, but he could not. His ideas rushed with marvellous confusion one over the other; his lamp was fast sinking in the socket, and it seemed as if his mind would sink with it. He bathed his parched lips with a little wine, and strove to recollect where he was, and what had happened; but it was in vain. A deep languor began to oppress him, but the only distinct idea which now remained was some indefinite horror of the bed. He remained, therefore, where he was, in the arm-chair, and fell into a kind of half-conscious doze.

An hour might have passed thus, when he became aware of a slight crackling sound in his ear, and starting with a sensation of universal cold, he looked around. The fire had burned into red embers; and though his own figure was lost in the black shadow of the chimney, the rest of the room was faintly illumined by a red reflection from the grate. He saw—he was certain he saw—the tapestry figure of Ahasuerus waver on his throne; it stirred with more violence, and the tapestry swelled out; then a head appeared at the bottom—the thick matted locks and beard of a man level with the floor; it paused for a moment, and then the face turned up as if to listen. The glare of the embers fell full upon it, and in the swarthy countenance and basilisk eyes of that head, Mervyn recognised the features of Elkanah, the alchemist.

He now concluded that he was delirious, though he marvelled at having reason enough to know it, and looked on rather with a dreadful curiosity as to what frightful phantasmata his imagination was about to present, than any other feeling. A figure followed the head, sliding out like a serpent, and occasionally pausing to listen, until it

lay at full length on the floor, then gradually it raised itself upright, and seemed to wipe the dust from its face and eyes, shaking back its shaggy hair.

Mervyn looked on with what one might almost call philosophical curiosity, to see what his imagination would do with this extraordinary phantom, having evoked it. It proceeded in all its movements apparently with breathless caution, and though convinced that all he saw was an illusion, Mervyn shuddered at the expression of that diabolical countenance. The figure fumbled in its upper garments, and drew out a dagger—*the* dagger—his father's dagger. He marvelled at the coincidences of his disordered fancy, and remained absorbed in watching the illusion.

It listened, and as if satisfied with hearing no sound, moved towards the bed on tiptoe, paused a brief moment, drew the curtains slightly back, and raised its arm as if to strike where its spectator should have lain. But suddenly that arm was arrested by another—a hand which seemed to strike it with paralysis. The apothecary uttered a slight shriek, and turned his horror-struck countenance. The fire lighted with a sudden glow that silent and terrific group—it was Blood and Elkanah.

Mervyn smiled at these strange phantasmagoria of his imagination; he thought that he could dismiss the whole vision by an effort, but he would not make it; it amused him like a wild dream, and he almost laughed at the spasmodic workings of Elkanah's face; but his diversion changed to the most dreadful sensation of horror when he heard his phantoms speak in human tones.

"Hush, on thy life, thou Jewish devil! a word, and I crush thee," said Blood, in an awful undertone.

"Colonel Blood, is it indeed you?" gasped the affrighted wretch.

"Look on me—thou hast some cause to know me," replied Blood.

"Hist! wake him not, and both our fortunes are made," said Elkanah, in a low, crawling tone. "I vill share vid you, Blood, like a brother. Serve him as you served his father, and ve vill divide the spoil: it vill make us both for ever—tree tousand pounds, Blood!"

"Give me the dagger," said Blood, quietly disarming him. "Stand there; if thou but move a hair's breadth, this steel is buried in thy heart."

The apothecary cowered abjectly down, and Blood moved towards the bed; but he stood as if irresolute, and muttered, "I cannot, I dare not look at him *there*! Ho, Mervyn, Master Mervyn!"

Mervyn could not but think that his fevered imagination was playing him false, and repeating the dire phases of his father's murder; but the illusion began to grow too terrific. He resolved to break it by palpably convincing himself of the non-existence of the spectre before him; he arose, but with such a strong air of likeness and existence did the whole group strike him, that he involuntarily exclaimed, "Blood!"

The colonel glared round, and a beam of firelight falling on the prisoner's form, he seemed as if thunderstruck, staggered a few paces back, and fell against the wall, with a shock which struck on Mervyn the full conviction that it was a material substance. His first effort was to spring at the dagger; his next to rush to the fire, and attempt by stirring the embers to obtain some light. He then faced his enemies, but Elkanah and Blood were both gazing at him in an agony of fear, the latter half raised on his elbow.

"Colonel Blood, do you not know me?" he said at length, in tones which, without intending it, were really awful in depth and horror.

"Mercy, mercy, Aumerle!" groaned Blood. "Mercy, my lord! I slew thee, but take not my soul to everlasting fires! I would have saved your son—I will save him—anything to remove thy never-ceasing wrath!"

"If you would save the son of Aumerle,—I am he!" replied Mervyn. "Dost thou not know me, murderer?"

"Is it thou, in thy bodily form—thou, Mervyn?" exclaimed he, shuddering convulsively.

"It is I—Mervyn of Aumerle."

"I come to save you at the risk of my life," said Blood, leaping briskly up. "Come, come! there is no time to be lost; if discovered, life is the least thing lost. Where is the Jew assassin?"

"If you mean me, I am here," said Elkanah, with a look of fiendish hate. "But beware how you hurt but a hair of my head. At my Lady Howard's command I have *poisoned your wound.* I alone possess the antidote—I alone can save you from the most horrible death, a slow and living rot! Now kill me, if you dare!"

"I did dream as much," said Blood, wildly; "but if thou hast poisoned my wound, I know this much of surgery, 'tis too far gone to be cured; but I reserve thee for a worthier fate than my dagger. Hast any arms?"

The fire now blazed brightly up, and by its light Blood searched the villain, but he found no weapon. He then lifted the tapestry, and Mervyn saw with amazement a square hole, about two feet high, which seemed formed by the displacing of one of the huge stones in the wall. "Enter there, Mervyn! fear nothing," he said. "It is a secret passage contrived in the thickness of the wall, and leads to liberty. Elkanah, follow—I will be last."

Mervyn hesitated—a dreadful idea crossed his mind that the whole was but a delusion got up to entice him to some secret slaughter-house; but could they not as easily take thither his dead carcase? He entered after an instant's hesitation, and the look which he gave Blood as he did so told him that the great secret was discovered, and Lord Aumerle's murder no longer a suicide.

He groped his way into the dark hole on all fours, for it was not high enough to admit of any other posture; the apothecary followed, and then Blood. Mervyn heard a loud crashing noise follow, and Blood called out that he had closed the spring marvellously well, and then he laughed. There was now not a gleam of light, but utter, almost palpable darkness; the passage was so narrow that Mervyn could hardly force himself along, and the air was so thick and dusty that it almost stifled him. He groped his way along, however, and his knowledge that the old poisoner was close behind, perhaps with a weapon, gave him the serpent's strength to crawl.

It was a terrific passage, and would have been impassable to all but resolution of the most extraordinary description. It was probably contrived in the original architecture, for it seemed impossible to have been made at any subsequent period, so massive were the stones of that Tower, and so curiously welded together. Narrow as it was, to Mervyn's horror the way seemed to grow narrower, and abominable as Blood's voice was in his ears, it sounded like sweet music when it called to him that all was right. At last, though it widened, the height of the passage seemed to diminish, until, grovelling as he did perfectly flat, Mervyn could strike his head against the roofing with scarcely lifting it. His lungs

panted for want of air, and the horrors of suffocation seemed to threaten him; at the same time he was assailed by the dreadful idea that his companions would retreat, and leave him to die in the unfathomable horrors of a living tomb! For a moment he thought of forcing his way back, but the narrowness of the space prohibited all idea of the sort.

His eyes and mouth were now choked in dust, and he called to Blood that he was suffocating; in reality he was rapidly yielding to the horror of his situation, and a moment's deprivation of his faculties in such a situation was equivalent to giving himself up to death. But Blood did not seem to hear him, and making a last effort, he pushed forward a few feet, and felt with ecstatic joy that there was suddenly space above his head. The passage was now both wider and higher, but it seemed to Mervyn as if they were hastening down an inclined plane. The height of the passage gradually increased, though the width was seldom more than that of a bulky man, and at last Mervyn found that he could raise his aching backbone. In a few more steps he could stand upright, but Blood assured him it was premature to do so, though they were near their exit. In fact, he was forced to go again on his hands and feet, and finally ramp on the earth, drawing himself painfully along like a wounded eel. But he now began to feel a cold, breezy air, which encouraged him, and wonderfully revived his exhausted spirits.

Suddenly he perceived a dull blue light, like that at the top of a chimney, and straining every nerve, in a few moments he had forced his body out at a narrow aperture, and found himself in great darkness, but with plenty of room to move about.

He was joined immediately by a figure which he took to be the apothecary, but he instantly knew it was Blood, by the voice. He inquired where Elkanah was. Mervyn replied that he knew not, and Blood stood apparently puzzled for a moment.

"The villain!" he said, in a hollow tone. "Ho, Elkanah, make haste back—fate gives thee one more chance for thy villanous life!"

There was no reply, but a grating sound was heard, and the hole whence they had made their exit closed with a massive stone, as if by some mighty spring set at work, so that the wall seemed whole and perfect as ever.

"Do you hear that?" said Blood, in an awestruck tone. "Poor wretch! he knows not that the spring will not open from the inside."

"He hath returned to give the alarm," said Mervyn.

"Hath he?" said Blood, with a bitter laugh. "They will hear him at the day of judgment, then. But his fate's of his own carving. He must do as well as he can—and so must we. He is there with his great secret of endless life, and, I trow me, will be immortal to-morrow. We are on the steps of the Traitors' Gate—hear you not the roar of the moat? Some dozen steps are here, and at the bottom is the water: when you feel well your feet, plunge deeply beneath the spikes of the gate, and follow the cut."

Blood himself set the example by running down and plunging; Mervyn unhesitatingly followed the example, and after a deep dive in the muddy water, found himself outside the gate, in the moat, shone on by as lovely a moon as ever welcomed man to liberty. Blood led the way to the opposite bank, and they scrambled out just under the thick shadow of the chestnuts, which in those days was called the Ladies' Walk.

"You are safe now if you can keep yourself *perdue* for a few hours," said Blood, triumphantly. "Give me your hand—say you forgive me!"

"I cannot—your hand is red with my father's blood!" replied Mervyn.

"Folly—madness to chaffer now; but I must not leave my work half done: come with me and resume your canonicals. Follow me!"

And Blood led the way to a miserable pot-house near the Tower.

CHAPTER LVIII

CLAUDE DUVAL'S LAST RIDE

Having washed himself, and put on the disguise which Blood had provided, Mervyn began to ruminate on his extraordinary escape, and on what was necessary to perfect it. He was interrupted by Blood, who came in looking ghastly pale in the dawning light.

"That villain spoke truth!" he said, pantingly. "The anguish of my wound passes all belief; I am on fire in my vitals. For God's pity, Mervyn, assist me to crawl to my old burrow in Alsatia, to die. It is revenge enough for thee to have inflicted the blow whereof I feel I shall not have long to complain."

Mervyn looked at the wan and miserable countenance of the strong man, whom in former days he had seen in all the insolence of strength; and he could scarce forbear compassionating the woeful figure which he now presented —tears of anguish running down his cheeks. He assented by silence rather than words, and they walked forth together on as lovely a morning as ever broke.

Early as it was, the streets seemed in a state of great bustle and movement. They could not divine the reason, and were not without apprehensions, until, passing Newgate, they heard St. Sepulchre's bell tolling for an execution. A crowd was assembled round the gates, a troop of soldiers and a posse of constables. Blood asked who was to be hanged, and a bystander answered that it was Claude Duval, and seemed quite astonished that any one could ask the question.

Almost as this answer was given the gate rolled open, and a cart, drawn by two black horses, appeared. It was painted black, and the sides were ornamented with grinning deaths' heads and crossbones. There was a coffin studded with bright nails on the front, and leaning gracefully on it sat Claude Duval, dressed, as it seemed, with peculiar care on the occasion. He wore a suit of brown velvet, very richly embroidered with silver, violet gloves, and a red silk nightcap, with the tassel of which he played negligently. The ordinary in his long black gown, and the hangman in his greasy leather doublet, were the other personages honoured with a seat in the conveyance. The sheriffs and some gentlemen followed in a gilded carriage, and two files of musketeers walked on each side.

A shout of welcome greeted the advance of the *cortège*, and Claude bowed graciously, pressing his hand to his heart. He had something of the sickly tint of the dungeon, but the bright morning and the shout returned his usual high colour, and his eye ranged curiously among the crowd, as if he were seeking the countenances of old friends and acquaintances.

"I must bid Claude farewell," said Mervyn, forcing his arm from Blood's grasp, who would have detained him, but finding the effort in vain, he handed him a sealed packet. "Be careful of it—it is your pardon!" he exclaimed, as Mervyn mechanically took it. The words fell without significance on his ear, but he put the packet in his bosom, and pushed on. The crowd, taking him for some minister bent on thrusting Protestant truths on the popish highwayman, gave way, and Mervyn soon reached the cart.

"Claude Duval!" he said, in his well-known accents, "would you die like a dog without succour of religion?"

Duval, who was now glancing at a missal, turned sharply round, and stared astonishedly at Mervyn, who touched his lips significantly, and Claude, with ready wit, took the hint.

"I have refused the consolations of this gentleman," he said, "but mayhap he will not in his charity refuse to let the hungry eat, though it be not bread of his baking."

"A popish priest in disguise, eh, merry Claude?" said the ordinary, who was of the Vicar of Bray's school, and fancied he saw the times changing. "Well, well, every man to his taste—hist, sir, your hand?" and he assisted Mervyn to get into the cart.

Mervyn and Claude embraced with much emotion, and Claude eagerly inquired in French how he came to be at liberty. In a few brief words the former related his marvellous escape, and Duval listened with a breathless interest which seemed to turn his attention altogether from his own deplorable position.

"Thank God, thank God!" he said, "I have lived to know that my suspicions were well founded, and I die not with an unjust thought in my heart. Oh, that remorseless villain! would I could live only to avenge my noble master!"

"It needs not; the blow I inflicted is mortifying with cankerous poisons," replied Mervyn.

"This is justice, and it makes me think my lot in the next world will be better than in this," said Claude, sadly. "I have shed no man's blood, and not an eye of all these looks at me with reproach. No orphan's groan, no widow's shriek, shall follow me to the bar above, and I doubt if those who condemned me can say as much. The women, heaven bless them! you will not see a dry eye among

them ; Claude Duval has lived in their smiles, and he will die in their tears. Besides, I confessed and received absolution last night from the *gran padre* himself."

"What *gran padre*, Claude ?"

"Oliva himself—your ancient protector. He hath come over secretly, to direct the great revolution which is restoring England to the Church. I told him all your sorrows, your loves, misadventures, and what not. He was astonished to learn that the famous conspirator was his little *protégé*, and promised to attempt something in your favour."

"Then 'tis he who hath obtained my pardon—or what was it that Blood said ?" exclaimed Mervyn, drawing out the packet.

A paper appeared sealed with the great seal of England, and with a surprise which may be well conceived, he found a pardon, in which his legitimacy was acknowledged ; but it was conditioned that he should reside abroad for three years.

"I have lived long enough," said Claude, joyfully. "But can this possibly be done by Oliva ? He told me the King's hate was inexorable. Have you no other friend, Mervyn ?"

A dreadful thought darted into the young man's mind, but he strove to reply in the negative with calmness. Meanwhile the words "pardon," though pronounced in French, reached the ears of the crowd, and a general cry arose of, "Claude is pardoned !" followed by an equally general hurrah.

"I wish you would prove your words, gentlemen," said Claude, shaking his head mournfully. "But you have not left your warm beds so early for nothing—Claude Duval is to be hanged, sure enough."

"Oh, Duval !—and but for your goodness to me you were not here," said Mervyn, much affected.

"That is my only comfort, sir ; but 'tis as well to-day as any other," replied Claude. "I thank God, I die fulfilling the oath which I made to my noble master, your father. And now I may tell you his dying words and wish. 'Teach my son to weep for me, to honour my memory, tell him his father loved him best when least he seemed.' Oh, my dear master !"

As he spoke Mervyn melted into tears.

"Nay, my lord," he continued—"I warrant I shall not

be the last to give you that title—do not take the stiffening out of me. I would die as good game as any beef-fed Englishmen of them all. I will not shame fair France at the gallows. *Vive la France! Vive la France!* If ever you live to have your own, Master Mervyn, give me a faithful dog's place at my master's feet; for you will take him out of his grave in the Tower Ditch?"

The shouts of a dense mob, closely wedged together, now announced their arrival in the Tyburn road. The great curiosity of the eager masses was to witness Claude's arrival in St. Giles's, where, at a tavern, occupying the site of an old hospital, according to ancient custom, prisoners were presented with a bowl on their way to execution.

The scattered little village now came in sight, looking bright, and green, and cheerful in the transparent beauty of the morning. Who could think of death while contemplating the sunny verdure of trees, the sweet serene blue of the sky, the glittering weathercocks on the roofs, the playful shine on the ponds, and busy animation of all things living! Claude's cheek did, nevertheless, blanch as they approached the Crown—the resting-place whence the stirrup-cup of the last journey was wont to issue. The inn came in sight, with its innumerable chimneys and carved balcony, but Mervyn's attention was turned towards Sydney's deserted mansion, peeping above the woods, and half concealed in their autumn luxuriance.

It seemed as if it were some day of festival instead of sorrow and death. A bright flag waved from the roof of the Crown, and the light Italian verandah over its rustic portico was crowded with gay groups of cavaliers and ladies of rank, in masks. Among the latter, one was conspicuous by the whiteness of her throat and symmetrical chin, though her face was well concealed by a black visor.

To the superstitious eye of one going to death this glittering mass, with their black faces, might well have kindled an idea of fiends looking on with satisfaction at the sight; but in Claude it roused recollections of mirth and festival, which sought relief in a heavy sigh.

A shout, and the dead halt of the procession, announced its arrival before the inn, and immediately a stout handsome girl, with a silver tankard in her hand, followed by a jolly bluff-looking host, who carried a can of some bright red liquor, appeared at the cart.

"Good-bye, Duval—honest Duval, for all you are to be hanged," said the host, heartily shaking Claude by the hand. "Thou art going aloft, good fellow, and though it be to the masthead, many a worse fellow shall stand on the world's deck to-night."

"Good-bye, Jack Edwards—hearty Jack!" said Claude, "and bonny Mistress Edwards! give me but one parting kiss of your sweet lips, that I may go out of the world with a rosy taste on my mouth."

And bending gracefully down, he saluted the pretty hostess ere she could say nay.

"Well, well, Duval, thou art a merry fellow to the last—good claret to the lees," she said, smilingly. "See you now, my good man knows you were never much of an ale-bibber, so we have brought you a stoup of our very best Burgundy, at which half the gallants of the city have smacked their lips."

And suiting the action to the word, the hostess handed him a glittering tankard of the beverage. Claude raised it up and looked at the gay verandah—for a moment Mervyn saw that his hand trembled. The lady with the fair neck was now heard to sob, and taking a rich nosegay from her breast, she threw it to Claude, saying in a sweet but tremulous voice, "God pity thee, brave Duval!"

"'Tis Mistress Gwyn," said Claude, in a whisper, as he stooped to pick up the flowers, and kissing them, he put them gallantly in his bosom. He then waved the full tankard, and exclaiming, "To the women of France and England!" drank, but not deeply. He then handed the cup to Mervyn, who touched it to his lips, and passed it to the ordinary, who declined with a mournful shake of the head. Claude then handed it to the hangman, observing, "It will do thee good, friend; steady thy hand," and the functionary drained it to the dregs.

"Well, I ain't dainty," said Edwards, as the goblet came back; "I would drink after a dog, but not after that murderer by trade—so here's to your health and prosperous voyage, Duval, in the can!"

And he took a hearty swig, handing it afterwards to his wife, who followed his example. The signal was then given to proceed, and with a farewell bow at the verandah, on went the prisoner and his train.

As the cart turned towards Tyburn, and its fatal trees

came in sight, Claude's face flushed deeply, and in a low voice he desired Mervyn to assist him with the prayers of the Catholic Church; Mervyn, though much moved, complied. He chanted the litany for the dying, which he had learned at St. Omer, and Claude devoutly joined in the responses. The mob, although nearly all fanatic anti-papists, offered no interruption, but listened in solemn silence. Tyburn was now distinctly in sight; the black gallows appeared above the trees. The cart drove slowly over the turfy ground, and came at last to the tremendous halt.

Claude sprang up, pressed Mervyn's hand, and leaped on the ladder, which he ascended with a firm step to the scaffold. Mervyn followed, and was by his side instantly. Claude thanked him with a look of silent but emphatic eloquence. The ordinary, considering his services superfluous, remained in the car, and the executioner followed, concluding the procession.

"And now, sir, leave me—you look as if you were going to be hanged yourself," said Claude; and he added in a whisper, "I see a scowling pair of eyes fixed on you in the throng; besides, I would not you should see me dangling there like a scarecrow in an orchard. Farewell, my dear, dear master! Heaven bless you!"

Overcome by emotion, Mervyn and his faithful protector embraced for the last time; but Mervyn would not leave him, and, at his desire, he commenced murmuring a *miserere* in a low voice, while Claude mounted to the fatal drop. Mervyn saw them draw the cap over his face, and sobs choked his own utterance; but Duval called out in a merry tone, "Get a mass said for my soul, master, and commend me to beauteous Mistress Sydney!" and then muttering a short prayer, the dismal "Ha!" from the mob, as if every man had received a blow in the breast, announced that the fatal drop had descended.

CHAPTER LIX

LOVE AND DEATH

While Claude Duval went through the last act of his drama, another scene was enacting on a far different stage—the royal palace of Whitehall. About noonday, a massive gilded coach, such as was used by the prime nobility of the time, drew up at the great gate, and two ladies dismounted. These were the Lady Howard and Aurora Sydney—the latter in deep mourning. Chiffinch was in waiting, and escorted them with ceremonious respect to a magnificent apartment. It included a great variety of chambers and cabinets, apparently fitted up for female habitation, in a most profuse style. The saloon in which they were at last allowed to remain was hung with rich French tapestry, representing scenes of licentious gaiety, drinking, love-making, shepherds and shepherdesses lounging in artificial landscapes, and attending to anything but their sheep. Richly gilded furniture, candelabra, vases of massy silver, curious birds, and glittering Italian curiosities, were crowded around.

Chiffinch observed, with a smile, that these were the apartments of the late Lady Castlemaine. Aurora seemed scarcely to notice that he spoke to her, or of the gorgeous show around; she threw herself into a chair, and seemed absorbed in a reverie. Once or twice she put her hand to her bosom, and, as if satisfied that what she thought was there, relapsed into profound thought; insomuch that she heeded not the disappearance of Lady Howard, who, after whispering a little with Chiffinch, glided out. The latter drew a table of inlaid gold, covered with caskets and fragrant vases, towards the lady, and retired also.

Aurora looked round, and smiled with a ghastly expression; but her meditations, whatever their nature, soon terminated. There was a slight tap at the door, and a cavalier entered, exquisitely dressed, perfumed, jewelled, fresh, gay, and sparkling as a bridegroom. It was the King. A momentary blush crimsoned Aurora's cheek; she sprang up, advanced a few steps, and knelt as Charles extended his hand in welcome. He raised her immediately.

"No, dear Aurora, that posture is rather mine," he said, with a triumphant smile.

"Mock not your woeful suppliant, sire," she said, as he kissed her hand tenderly.

"Nay, I am the suppliant now," he replied, leading her to a seat, near which he drew another for himself. "Yet, you can ask nothing of me which I will refuse. What is it, dearest?" And he gazed at her for a moment, as a wolf gazes at its prey; but he was obviously startled with her excessive paleness, and the wild, unnatural brilliancy of her eyes.

"What would you ask, lovely Sydney?" he said at last, observing that she could not speak from the intensity of her emotion. "All that Charles of England hath is yours—his realm—himself. These apartments are yours—Richmond is yours—the proudest title your woman's fancy can shape. Nay, I will even pledge myself, if my wife dies, to make you Queen of England in her room. My brother did as much with a poorer cause, and the common sort applauded him. Did he not marry Hyde's daughter, whom I reared from a dunghill? and your house is, perchance, as ancient as ours."

"Instead of all these immense gifts, I only ask a single life!" said Aurora—"a life which taken will cover your name with perpetual dishonour—spared, will redeem it almost to men's love."

"Your father's—he shall be spared," said Charles. "Have I not already pardoned one whose blood my soul panted for—the traitor Mervyn?"

"He lacks no pardon of yours, sire!—Mervyn hath escaped from the Tower, or the news which sets all London agape is false!" replied Aurora, with a smile of unearthly horror; "unless thou, false King, and every way most monstrous betrayer, hast had him privily murdered and buried him from the accusing light of day."

"I swear to you, Aurora, by all that is sacred, he is living and breathing at this moment for aught I know to the contrary," said Charles, turning pale, "He hath bribed his warders, or flown through the air—what do I know?"

"Well, he is dead and gone," said Aurora, with sad serenity; "so no more bargaining for him—only my father's head is in the market now. Pardon him—release him from his durance—and I will believe you."

"You ask too much," said Charles; "his life is sacred as mine own; but his pardon and release must be the work of time. My brother, all my faction—for I am but the head of a faction—would turn round on me, like mad dogs on their master."

"You think to betray me, ha! and to butcher him too!" exclaimed Aurora, with wild vehemence. "But I will believe in no pledge, no oaths, no heaven-shaking protestations—nothing but facts."

"What would you have?" exclaimed Charles; "methinks I would hazard all—crown—life—vengeance—to win but one angelic smile from those pale lips."

"Your council, they tell me, is sitting now to decide upon my father's death," replied Aurora. "Go to those bloodthirsty men; tell them you are a King, and that the royalest virtue of a King is mercy. Tell them that enough blood has been shed in this baffled conspiracy; that Sydney is innocent, and that if he be guilty you are resolved to pardon him. Send then to the Lieutenant of your Tower, bid him release his prisoner, and return to me for—for your reward!"

"By Heaven! thou movest me,'" said the king, irresolutely gazing at her. "Enough blood hath, indeed, been shed; I will not burthen my soul with more. I will to the council—I will do your bidding to the letter, let Oliva and York prate as they will. But you must not quit me ever again, loveliest! These apartments must henceforth be yours, and as soon as I have done your will with the council, I will return to bask in the full sunshine of your restored beauty and love."

"It shall be so," she said, with a ghastly smile, and suffering Charles to press his hot lips to hers without reluctance, and almost without consciousness, she sat gazing steadfastly at him. Charles felt that this scene was growing indescribably painful to himself; it seemed as if she read the inmost secrets of his soul in that long, profound, and melancholy gaze. He muttered something that she was very pale, and going to a beaufet, brought her a goblet of wine.

"No, no," she said, shuddering as she raised it to her lips; "it is blood, you see—Aumerle's blood! Go to the council; I shall be well anon—I need but peace—nothing but peace."

And reclining her sorrow-stricken form in the damask

chair, she closed her eyelids in a kind of slumber. Charles seemed to hesitate for a moment, but having satisfied himself that she breathed, he suddenly left the apartment, locking the door after him.

The moment he was gone, Aurora started up, with a strange expression of despair and triumph in her look, which seemed at once mingled and separate. She glanced around, but her eye passed unheedingly over the glitter and pomp of the gorgeous chamber; she sought only if any one observed her. There was something utterly desperate in that glance. The sun shone brightly in at the windows, and she gazed for a moment at the smiling landscape of park scenery, but it was without consciousness. A single thought seemed to have frozen fixedly in her brain. She poured some wine into a goblet deliberately, took a powder from her bosom and shook it in, every grain. "I will join him in heaven—his unstained wife!" she said, aloud. "God is not so merciless as man—He will forgive me. He knows how far He has made humanity to endure, and that I have reached the limit. This, at least, is not suicide; it is murder, murder, murder!" and she repeated the word as if it consoled her.

She shook the glass round and round to mix the fine powder which stood on its surface, and it might be that something of the dark shadow of death crossed her young imagination. She started, and set the cup down; a few leaden tears rolled slowly down her cheeks; but the emotion soon passed, and desperate thoughts crowded thickly on her fancy, and she raised the goblet to the sun as if to admire the exquisite purple tint to which the wine had turned by its contact with the mortal drug. She then, though but slowly, brought it to her lips, and was about to drink, when a long lean hand clutched her arm, and stopped the movement. She looked around with a stifled shriek, and saw what at first she took to be an illusion of her maddened fancy. It was a venerable old man, whose figure, though much bent and depressed with years, was still commanding, and his countenance remarkable for its antique grandeur of form and benevolence of expression. He was dressed in a thick dark mantle, such as usually worn by ecclesiastics of the Church of Rome, which fell in ample folds around his lofty frame.

"What wouldst thou do, unhappy one?" said the

stranger, after a minute's profound pause, and in tones so full of pity and love, that Aurora looked with a kind of vacant wonder at him, and set the goblet down.

"May I not even die?" she exclaimed, after a momentary pause.

"Who hath bidden thee to die—He who alone hath the right?" said the ecclesiastic, mildly. "In His cause, and at His command it is indeed lawful to brave all things; but where is thy celestial manumission, that thou darest to throw off the yoke He hath imposed?"

"What mean you? May I not taste the King's wine?" said Aurora, wildly and affrightedly staring at the apparition.

"And dost thou fear a creature—thou, who wert about to rush unsummoned into the presence of thy Creator?" he replied, solemnly. "Look not so amazedly at me; I know that this cup overflows with poison. Nay, more, I have been an unseen spectator of your interview with the King; I know all your bygone misfortunes; and I am here to save you from one greater than all—a death like this."

"The King keeps not so niggard a house that you need grudge me this draught," said Aurora, with wild fierceness. "I am the King's visitor; no one shall hinder me from sharing his hospitality."

And she clutched the goblet in both her slender hands, glaring with mad defiance in the old man's face.

"Nay, drink," he said, hindering her in no respect, save with his hand gently on her arm; "drink, but not with the tremendous thought that thereby you commit suicide. It is but a soporific draught of great power."

"Hath he, too, deceived me?" sighed Aurora, in a heartbroken tone.

"You mean Colonel Blood?" replied the priest. "Yes, to thy immortal benefit! He and I plotted to save Mervyn, and the only bait that could tempt the King, alas! was thy ill-starred loveliness. And even when he consented to pardon thy lover, it seems a black plot was at work that should have rendered this mercy of no effect. But the malice of Mervyn's enemies worked only his safety. They confined him in a dungeon which has a secret exit, and he is now safe and at liberty."

"No, no, he is murdered—he is buried, all mangled, in the Tower!" gasped Aurora.

"And think not that it were possible to save your

father!" continued the Jesuit. "The King is pledged by many oaths to give his head to the axe; the short dream of passion over, his cruelty will regain the upper hand."

"And who art thou who speak to me with this usurped authority?" said Aurora, drying her streaming eyes, with a vain effort at composure.

"The friend of Mervyn's childhood—your friend—all men's friend, save those who rage in savage ignorance against the Church—Johannes de Oliva, a servant of Christ, and general of all His societies."

"Oh, father, father! and will you abandon me to the tyrant?" said Aurora, wildly clasping her hands.

"No, my child; rather will I perish myself," replied the Jesuit, compassionately. "But we must deal subtly as with subtle men—all things to all. Drain this goblet—*now*,—a deep slumber only will follow; but we will make the King believe that, in your despair, you have swallowed poison. He will then comprehend the vastness of a hate which, in so young and tender a woman, could overcome the fear of a painful death. Drink, child! you see I do not fear to taste it," and he sipped from the cup.

"Give it me; I do not fear to drain it," she said, eagerly raising it to her lips; but a sudden suspicion checked her. She looked at the priest with a troubled eye. "Can it be," she said, "that thou betrayest me, priest—dreading of a failure in my resolution? Do you fear in me a rival to your authority? Eager for the blood of Sydney, fear you his daughter's influence over the tyrant's heart?"

"Wherefore should I stay this hand, then, when the draught of death—if such it were—was on your lips?" said Oliva, sadly. "But be it as you will; I force you not to drink. Methinks I hear footsteps."

"But what if—abandoned in sleep—oh, terror!" shrieked Aurora, clasping the monk's tremulous hand.

"Heaven make these words my last, if I mean you ill?" he said, solemnly. "Can you not trust one who so loved your Mervyn, that to my childless age he almost seemed a dear and well-loved son?"

"Yes, I *will* trust you; the issue be with Heaven!" said Aurora, and she drained the goblet to the dregs.

"Lovely martyr! Alas! how sudden it is!" exclaimed Oliva. "How feel you? you look dull and faint, child."

"All things reel about me; my heart is clogged with some heavy weight!" sighed Aurora, very faintly.

The Jesuit put his arm round her sinking form, and almost carried her over the room to a couch of silver tissue, on which she sank. Imagination probably hastened the natural agency of the potion; she lay for a moment gazing with faint eyes in the monk's face, who still held her hand, and then she sank into a profound sleep. Her countenance and figure looked so calm and sepulchral, that but for the light breathing of her lips, she might have been a marble chiselling of repose. Oliva arranged her garments with fatherly care, laid the cup beside her with its glistening dregs, and then paused a moment to survey the sleeper. Tears came to his aged eyes, but, hearing footsteps in the corridor, he retreated behind the gilt curtains of a window, which had been his former hiding-place.

The door opened, and Charles entered nimbly, his features flushed with excitement. He looked around, uttered an exclamation of surprise, not at first perceiving Aurora, but his eye glanced at the couch, and in a moment he was kneeling beside it. But suddenly he started up as if stung by an adder, and stood aghast, gazing at the white and motionless form. He seemed to be stupefied for some minutes, when he clutched up the goblet and eagerly examined it, letting it fall to the ground as the terrible certainty rushed upon him. He called her name, he shook her, and finding that the lethargy defied all attempts to break it—that she fell lifelessly on the couch when he raised her—he rang a bell on the table with frantic violence. Chiffinch rushed in, but ere he reached the King, Oliva was there.

"What is the matter, my son?" he said very calmly.

"Oh, Oliva, look there! I have killed her! it is Sydney's daughter—she has taken poison!" groaned Charles. "Chiffinch, raise her—it cannot be—she is not dead!"

"Here, then, are all the fruits of your guilty passion, sire," said Oliva, gazing mournfully at the seeming corpse. "Oh, my son, for dust like this wouldst thou have bartered thine heavenly and temporal good for ever?"

"Madden me not, monk!" said Charles, wildly. "She is dead—she is dead, Chiffinch."

"Thou art mad, already, King!" said Oliva. "Again,

I say, wouldst thou have sacrificed so much for one who prefers death to you ? "

" She is not dead—she shall not die—she breathes ! " shouted the King. " Chiffinch, bring a physician—antidotes—where is Hudson ? "

" It is the stupor of death—she has swallowed poison," said Oliva. " Chiffinch, stay, I command you ; we will make no scene for the mob. Bear her from these apartments to those of Mistress Gwyn—the scandal will be less apparent. For Heaven's sake, stay where you are, sire—I will bring you news."

And making a sign to Chiffinch, they lifted the cushion on which the lady reposed, and bore her away ; while Charles, clasping his hands in mute agony, sank breathlessly into a chair.

CHAPTER LX

RETRIBUTION

It was with a feeling of the most utter despondency that Mervyn descended from the scaffold whereon had perished the faithful servant of his house ; and totally disregarding or forgetting Claude's intimation about his being observed, he resolved to find out Blood, and learn the truth as to the means by which his pardon had been obtained. Not doubting that he should find the colonel in his old haunts of Whitefriars, he took his way towards the river. As he went past Whitehall, however, a muffled figure brushed close past him, without pausing to apologise, though he looked back. Mervyn would scarcely have noticed this in his present mood, but that he had observed he was for some time followed by the same figure, who now took this rude means of gratifying his curiosity. A glance convinced Mervyn that it was Lord Howard, much as he endeavoured to keep himself concealed. He took his resolution immediately, and affecting to take no further notice, cut rapidly into the Mall, and thence to Hyde Park, observing with satisfaction that the figure still followed. Pausing at length in an obscure and retired spot, overshadowed by lofty oaks, Mervyn crouched at the trunk

of one of them, and awaited till his follower arrived almos close to him, looking anxiously around, but at too high level to perceive him. He then sprang up.

"Good day to you, master shadow!" he exclaimed "Prithee, are you in love with a kick, that you dodge so nigh my heels?"

"Is it you, indeed, Captain Mervyn?" said the figure, staring incredulously, as if he had seen a ghost.

"No, I am not Captain Mervyn," replied the young man, quivering with passion. "I am Mervyn of Aumerle, son of the earl that was murdered in the Tower, and thou art Howard of Eskricke, who caused his murder; and we two will not lightly part. Draw!" And his sword flashed in his hand, but not with so fierce a sparkle as his eye shot forth.

Howard delayed not an instant, and their blades met with a violence which he did not expect; his hand wavered, and his sword flew instantly into a thousand splinters.

"Curse on your hand—the advantage is yours!" he exclaimed. "Take my life—I value it not at the chink of a bad half-crown."

And he stood with dogged composure before Mervyn, who raised his sword, but Howard never shrank, and that moment had probably been his last, but for an inexplicable refinement of revenge which occurred to his enemy. "No, traitor! take a fitter recompense; thou art not worthy to die by a true man's sword—be the gallows branded on thy brow!"

Two bright slashes over his forehead were all that Howard felt, but the blood suddenly gushed into his eyes, and he knew that an indelible brand was fixed on his brow. Language can only faintly shape the horror of such a punishment to a man like Howard.

"Kill me!" he yelled, as Mervyn stood as if enjoying the bitter feast of revenge. "I prefer death—a million deaths!"

"No, live, live, wretch! to be the scorn and hatred of the world," said Mervyn, with a fearful laugh.

"And live thou to envy me in my misery!" retorted Howard; "live to this knowledge—thy life, thy pretended legitimacy, are bought at the price of Aurora Sydney's dishonour. Thy remorseless mother bore her to Whitehall

—to *him*!—this morning. She is his! Live, now, my Lord Aumerle, to imitate thy father!"

Mervyn stood for some moments as if rooted to the spot. "'Tis as I thought," he said, at length. "'Tis all over now. But think not, Howard, to provoke me to take the curse from thy brow, and slay thee. Live, renegade! live, seducer! but henceforth no man shall be deceived in thee, for wherever thou goest thy branded brow proclaims thee."

As he concluded these words, he folded his cloak round his naked sword, and strode off without even looking behind him, leaving Howard fixed like a statue of despair.

Mervyn plunged instantly among some thickets, and taking a by-path, reached the river. His perturbed resolutions were now again altered. He determined to ask an interview with Sydney in the Tower, at whatever risk, and learn from him the real state of the affair; for he concluded that, if Aurora were indeed sacrificed, he too must have received a reprieve or pardon.

A two-oared sculler, at which he himself plied like a madman, soon brought him to the Tower; and as no one announcing himself as Sydney's friend was denied access to him now that friendship could be of no service, he was readily admitted. A warder escorted him to the White Tower, in which Sydney was confined, and ushered him into a large, handsome apartment, well furnished, lighted by candelabra and with a brilliant fire. The warder ushered him in, and bolted the door after him.

Sydney looked up with evident surprise. He was reading a paper to two gentlemen sitting near him—one of them the Lord Cavendish, the other a grave, aristocratic-looking man, whose likeness to Sydney stamped him as his near kinsman, even if Mervyn had not instantly recognised him as the Earl of Leicester.

"Good heavens, Mervyn!" exclaimed Sydney. "Is it indeed you, rash boy? After escaping from the lion's jaws, do you rush into them again? or are you come to teach us how to get out at a keyhole?"

"No, colonel, you have no subterraneous entrance contrived for murder," said Mervyn, wildly. "But I defy the lion; his teeth are drawn. See you here—I am pardoned—my rights acknowledged—nay, 'tis the great seal."

He handed the document as he spoke to Sydney, who, after glancing over it in mute astonishment, handed it to the two noblemen.

"Good saints! and what mighty service have you done to be thus rewarded?" said the colonel, amazedly; "or are you a magician, Mervyn?"

"Have you not got your reprieve yet?" exclaimed Mervyn.

"No, Heaven knows, unless you call yonder death warrant a reprieve from the toils and tyranny of this earth," said Sydney, pointing to a paper. "It is a gauntlet which I have taken up and answered in this appeal of mine to posterity, which, after all, is my judge—not Jeffreys."

"Has not your daughter sent you a reprieve?" said Mervyn, still more wildly.

"Alas! poor soul, no. My brother, Leicester, was indeed so unadvised as to sanction Lady Howard's taking her to the levée, to implore a pardon for me; and on a failure, which was inevitable, she hath been insensible ever since at Aumerle House," said Sydney, with much agitation of voice and look.

"And dated from this noon's council?" said Mervyn. "It is impossible—it cannot be—it would outrage Heaven too far to sacrifice the father and dishonour the daughter in one brief sundown."

"What mean you, Mervyn?" said Sydney, turning very pale.

The meaning was soon explained. Mervyn related his escape—his rencontre with Howard—the tidings concerning Aurora, in a few brief words, yet left no important circumstance untouched. Sydney listened with an anguish which at length vanquished all his stoicism, and, covering his face with his hands, groaned as if in the agonies of a painful death.

"My niece!" exclaimed Leicester, in whom family pride predominated—"the granddaughter of the great Sydney, and of almost royal Northumberland. This shall not be endured—all Christendom shall ring with it. Old and feeble as I am, my house hath still its friends; and we shall try, we shall try. Alas! what can we do?"

"Take comfort, dear colonel," said Lord Cavendish.

" If she hath consented to such dishonour, she is no longer your daughter, nor worth a single tear."

" Had it been but her death, I could have borne it—I could still have found comfort," said Sydney. " But her dishonour leaves me none—nothing." And he yielded to the intolerable anguish of his feelings in a few hot tears, which all his misfortunes had not yet extorted. But dashing them aside, he exclaimed, " Pardon me, friends! I confess I can no longer resist, but it will pass—it will pass. I will not shame our good cause with a weeping martyr. Oh, I will have vengeance yet! The sun shall draw my blood to heaven, and from thence a crimson cloud shall descend in tempests on this king-cursed earth! I leave my vengeance to my country. Oh, my country, my noble country, avenge me! Infamous tyrant! Oh, God, I cannot endure this!" And again he yielded to a silent ecstasy of sorrow; no one spoke; but each looked at the other with gushing eyes.

" Fool, madwoman! does she think to preserve my life on such terms?" he exclaimed, starting up. " Had she a drop of my blood in her veins, she would know it is impossible! I leave my everlasting curse upon her! Tell her so, Mervyn! Bear these as my dying words to her in her guilty pomp—she hath slain me with a keener stroke than the axe in an enemy's hand."

" But at least we shall be spared the anguish of seeing you die—you will live to vengeance, Sydney," said Lord Cavendish.

" No, no; even if the tyrant hath subdued her sorrow-weakened fancy to believe so, I feel it cannot be," said Sydney, in a voice of deep gloom. " He pardoned Mervyn—yet the same night murder was to have made his specious clemency vain. He dares not let me live, and I thank God for it! I can now lay my head on the block with no other regret than that mine own hand cannot avenge her. I leave that task to you, Mervyn. Remember, he who values not his own life is master of his enemy's; and the tyrant who deprives his victims of all hope sharpens the dagger for his own breast."

" I will live, Sydney, I swear it, henceforth only to vengeance!" exclaimed Mervyn, passionately. " That day, that hour, that minute, I cease to live for vengeance be my last!"

"Yet, after all, this may be but another lie of Howard's," said Sydney, with a sudden gleam of hope. "I take some comfort from this death warrant; it is dated from this day's council, at noonday; it cannot be that he is wearied already of his leman, to send her father's head to the block."

"I will hunt up Blood—I will extort from him the truth of this pardon," exclaimed Mervyn, catching at this straw with equal eagerness. "And, meanwhile, my Lord Leicester may to Aumerle House, and demand to see his niece—I think it cannot be refused."

"And, Cavendish, go with my son; your presence will hinder his from being questioned of men's eyes," said Sydney. "But tarry not—bring me back swift news—lest my heart break in ignorance."

This plan was hastily adopted; and promising to return with all possible expedition, the three gentlemen left the prisoner alone with his great sorrows.

CHAPTER LXI

A CATASTROPHE

Mervyn and Lord Cavendish, at the former's suggestion, now bent their course to the river, to go to Whitefriars by water. It was late, but they readily procured a sculler, which Mervyn, who knew the way but too well, undertook to guide. Long as the terrible phantasmagoria of the popish plot had passed, Mervyn shuddered as he turned the rudder towards the miser's house in Whitefriars, and when the boat ran up the dark archway, his very soul sickened. They ascended the stairs gropingly, and he easily pushed open that door which he would at one time have given the world to force—and once more he was in the ruined hall. A stream of moonlight shone through the fissures of the roof, and it seemed as if the events of the intervening years suddenly effaced themselves, and all the horrors and anguish of that terrible night returned upon him. He half thought that the dusky figure of Cavendish was a phantom of the departed; but these

visions vanished before the sudden light of a torch. Their footsteps had startled some one, and Tom Hunt's burly figure appeared in the gallery above.

"Well, Hunt, how is the colonel?" said Mervyn, stepping forward, in answer to the scrutinising stare which Tom cast over the hall. "Is he here?"

"Captain Mervyn—is it your honour?" said Tom, quietly putting a pistol in his breast, which he was levelling round. "Faith, I am glad to see you. I have been hunting all over the town for you, sir, and I am nigh dead of fear, though no chicken either. Oh, the poor colonel! you will hardly know him. He is going, sir, going—rotting piecemeal. But that's not the worst of it; he's dying like a devil—howls, gnashes his teeth, and does so beg for mercy it would make a stone pity. He won't die game, I'm afeard. Who's that—there?"

"A friend of mine," replied Mervyn. "Have you had a surgeon?"

"Yes; and he says in confidence to me, that the game's up," said Tom—"as how he couldn't last the night out, and that if he had to choose himself, he would rather be burned on a gridiron than die his death."

While Tom delivered this oration, he lighted the visitors through the gallery to the miser's chamber, and as they advanced, they could distinctly hear the deep measured groans of Blood, like those of an expiring bull. There was a narrow plank put over the well, which they crossed to enter the chamber of agony. Hunt went before to announce them, and as he held the streaming torch over the bed, Mervyn was horror-struck to perceive the figure on it. Blood lay on his back, convulsively clutching the folds of the rusty counterpane—his face swollen beyond all knowledge, and covered with purple blotches as if in a plague. His black hair lay in wet masses on the pillow, and his eyes seemed absolutely starting out of his head.

"What!—who are these in the black cloaks?" said he, gazing wildly around. "Oh, I understand—a funeral. Who is that yonder?—ha, Tom, who is that?" And he raised himself with a strong effort on his elbow, gazing intently at Mervyn, as he stood at the end of the bed.

"It is Captain Mervyn, sir," replied Tom.

"Rogue, you lie!" yelled Blood, pushing him violently back. "It is Aumerle—he whom I slew in the Tower—

come to bear my soul to everlasting fires! Spirit, I defy thee! I defy all hell! I can bear the worst, and challenge more! I spit upon thee, liar! I had never slain thee, hadst thou not resisted! Fool! was a little paper worth so much?"

"It is thy unhappy conscience shapes thy victim in his son, Blood," said Mervyn.

"Devil! to cheat me with such musical sounds!" said Blood, brokenly. "Thou canst not forgive me—thou wilt not—'tis no use to feign. See how implacably he glares at me! But again I tell thee, thy looks have no terror for me; I feared thee not alive, and I will not dead. I shuddered not when I heard thy blood dropping on the floor *that night*—did I not smile?—Thou liar! to say I feared thee in thy bloody sleep of death. Away, away, I scorn thee!"

"Retire apart, that he may not see you; it will calm him," said Cavendish; and Mervyn stepped behind the curtains.

Blood's eye still dwelt on his vacant place with great and curious attention. "Where is he gone now?" he said at last, with apparent pleasure. "I say, Hunt, don't you think he is sufficiently avenged—look at this carcase festering alive—the hell I feel within—might he not forgive me?"

"If he has any mercy in him at all, sir," said Tom, whimperingly.

"Tom, you are a good fellow, but you will come to the gallows, lad, at last; you are too good for this world," said Blood, with a strange smile. "Don't think I am frightened, because these tortures wring a groan or so from me; I will die as I have lived—bad as many a future age shall call me, no man shall say that he who stole the crown died a coward."

"Curse 'em! I'll slit the fellow's throat that says so," sobbed Hunt, overcome with this dismal idea.

"Don't sniffle, man—don't come the cant over me: yet I was once a sabbath-goer myself," said Blood, in a tone which, even from his harsh voice, sounded plaintive. "I was once as good as any of you, and could weep like a woman at the sight of blood; but evil communication corrupts good manners, Hunt. The court spoilt my virtues. Oh, I can recollect bounding out of school, and

nutting in the woods—merry times, merry times, my liege! But whereabouts is Master Mervyn? would he not come?"

"I am here," said Mervyn, again appearing.

"Ay, indeed!" said the colonel, with a long gasp. "Well, I have sent for your mother, boy, under pretext of giving up the papers and documents of your birth. I will force her to do you justice yet; but I loved her once, too—ah, too well. She used the strange magic of my despised love to make me half what I am."

"I care not for her nor your documents: tell me, how did you procure my pardon? Where is Aurora?" said Mervyn.

"She is safe, I trust," replied Blood. "Oh, yes, she is safe; the old monk has saved her—but I cannot tell you now; Lady Howard knows best."

"They are coming, sir," said Tom Hunt, entering from a short absence. "I see a boat, with Parrot and a muffled female in it; I warrant 'tis she, and well disguised."

"Sirs, hide yourself behind my bed; let her not see the wires till she is in the trap," said Blood. "Come forth at my signal. The world's turned topsy-turvy! There was a time I would have made mincemeat of ye all for a look of hers—but I can't be damned, even to oblige Eleanor d'Aumerle—lolly, jolly, molly, folly!" he concluded, humming the burden of a nonsensical street-ballad of the time.

The witnesses of this strange scene obeyed, though scarcely knowing what was intended, and Hunt assisted to conceal them behind the massive bedstead. The well-door opened with a sudden gust, as if an impatient hand were at it, and the commanding figure of Lady Howard, enveloped in a mantle, with her face half concealed by a black visor, entered. Parrot lighted her with a long flaring torch as he guided her over the narrow plank, and the countess walked, without uttering a word, to her accomplice's death-bed. Hunt instantly brought his torch into requisition, and lighted up the horrors of the scene, but the lady quailed not. Their eyes met, and after several moments of earnest and emphatic gaze, Blood withdrew his, muttering,

"Hard as ever!"

"Well, Mr. *Blud*, you have sent for me—I am here.

What do you want ?—where are the papers ? " said the countess, with great rapidity of utterance.

" Bring light, Hunt, let my lady see me," said the colonel, with a deep groan. " Have you no spring of pity in your heart, though marbled over with selfishness, Lady Howard ? Look at your miserable victim.—Oh, Eleanor, did I deserve this at your hands ? "

" At my hands, sir ? what mean you ? " exclaimed the countess, much agitated. " Am I then answerable for the diseases which Colonel Blood's riotous course of life—or, perchance, the malaria of this black retreat of crime, and misery——"

" It was built by your ancestor, the wizard baron—he who bored the infernal passage into the Bloody Tower, for his felonious purposes when constable there ! " said Blood, in a tone of dark melancholy. " Bitterly did the punishment fall on his race. But of natural causes I had not died for these twenty years. Eleanor, it is in vain to put an ignorant face on your work ; your prisoner, Elkanah, hath confessed all."

" Elkanah ! the villain lies ! " she exclaimed. " I bade him retard your cure, in sooth, lest your new idiocy of remorse should interfere with my plans ; but if this hideous tetter be poison, he is a murderer, but I am none."

" Will you swear that, when the eternal record is before you ? " said Blood, with a ghastly grin. " I would fain believe that she for whom I have lost soul and body could not thus slay me like a mad dog ! Alack ! we are a nest of vipers, that sting each other for lack of other victims."

" You are revenged to the glut, colonel." said the countess, recovering her relentless calm. " Have you not let Aumerle's son loose upon me—baffled me at the moment when I was about to be rid of him for ever without a crime —for was not his life forfeit to the laws ? "

" Down, down, on those stiff knees to thank God every hour that I have saved him from thy murderous intent ! " said Blood. " Is he not your son ? Are you not satisfied with his father's blood ? "

" I did not shed it—I defy thy malice to say so," exclaimed the countess. " I did not even consent to his death ; and but for thy pernicious instigation—I did but bid thee redeem the paper which would have ruined us all—who bade thee kill him, monster, as he slept ? "

"Who was it churned me up to madness when smarting with that insolent blow?" said Blood, forcing himself up on his elbow. "Who was it spoke more than an age of words in the tremendous silence wherewith thou gavest me the dagger back again? Who was it instructed me in the secret of that infernal passage?"

"It was a secret which I discovered by mere chance, deciphering the strange papers of my ancestor, for which no one but I had patience," replied the lady, deliberately. "Again I repeat, I but instructed thee to steal that fatal paper while he slept, and if the deed be mine, bitterly have I paid the forfeit! No night of quiet sleep, no day of tranquil thought! he, too, is false for whom I was false to all. Oh, could I have foreseen these times!"

"Wherefore, then, repent ye not, Eleanor?" said Blood, earnestly. "'Tis not too late. Your son still lives —preserved by a series of miracles: restore to him that whereof you have wronged him—his name and heirdom."

"No, Blood, no!" said the countess, grinding her teeth with a fiendish hatred. "I am of the same obstinate blood as that you shed, which preferred death to surrender. Give me the papers, if you have any, or I go without. I shall find means enough to keep your minion at bay."

"Deem you so! then you are mistaken," said Blood, sinking exhausted back on his pillow. "Those papers which I sold you at so dear a rate—even your own letter— are merely duplicates; the originals are in my possession. The missing dragon from the chain of the garter, with the earl's initials, I pawned to Elkanah. After his late mysterious disappearance" (this he said with a ghastly smile), "I ransacked his treasures, and found that among them. Perfectly as he imitated the earl's hand, no man that ever knew it, seeing them compared, but will know the original; besides, I took care that yours should be written on paper of a later water-mark than his death."

"Blood, Blood, what ravings are these?" exclaimed Lady Howard.

"Yes, that very letter in which you acknowledged your son—the earl's attestation of his legitimacy—all that I found in Duval's cloak, are still in my possession."

"Give them, then, to me, as thou hast sworn!" said the countess, dropping her mask in her agitation. "I will give thee all—everything thou canst ask!"

"With what canst thou bribe a man dying in the midst of these horrors?" said Blood, solemnly. "What is gold, what are riches, pomp, power—all the earth—to me?"

"You cannot have resolved to betray me—whom you loved once so well, dear Blood?" said Lady Howard, in a tone of melting entreaty.

"It is too late—your talisman is broken," replied the dying man. "Yet I can and will save you from open shame and exposure. Promise, to save my soul, that you will restore Aumerle to half the estates during your lifetime—acknowledge him, and I will procure you terms for the rest."

"I will not—I cannot!" replied she, fiercely. "Coward, have you forgotten the blow his father gave you in the Tower? Slave! he spurned you like a dog."

"You have played on that string till it is broken," said the colonel. "I cannot summon gall to think of him—all my revenge glutted itself in that infernal blow! Yet I would still save you—still the magic of your early power is on my heart. Oh, Eleanor, be merciful to yourself—force me not to expose you."

"Do your worst! I defy you, trickster!" exclaimed the countess. "A death-bed repentance for such a life as thine but makes the devil laugh. Thou hast betrayed me all along—the wretch, Elkanah, would never have so betrayed me. He had done his work like a man but for thy meddling hand and pretended conscience, which is but a new trick to extort money."

"He did not betray you; let us acquit his memory of the only good deed that ever was laid to his charge," said Blood. "But you should have chosen some other weapon than my dagger—that refinement of vengeance betrayed you! Elkanah was, and is likely to continue, very true to you."

"Where is he now?" said the countess, somewhat startled.

"Fear him not—he is whence he shall never come till the great day to testify against you," replied Blood, calmly. "He is quietly coffined in that passage whence murder shall issue no more—buried as deep as the foundation! He closed it on himself, not knowing that I had broken the spring at the other end, and so he is buried alive, poor

man, on the very verge of discovering the secret of eternal life ! "

" To what point of hellish turpitude have I reached, when to hear this horror gladdens me ? " said Lady Howard, faintly. " Oh, Blood, Blood, will you give me up to the executioner, and worse, worse—to shame incalculable—to the horror of all future ages, which, understanding but my crimes, will not perceive by what an invisible hand I was urged on ! That compelled marriage was the root of all my faults, which have forced on each other till I am the guiltiest wretch that ever trod beneath the heavens uncrushed. But I would not be cursed for ever. Oh, spare me, Blood, spare me ! " and she knelt, bathing her hands with a gush of tears.

" Bring the papers, Hunt," said the colonel, hastily, " I shall yield else."

Answering the call, Tom made his appearance, with an iron box carefully sealed, which he laid on the bed. The countess clutched it eagerly.

" Touch them not ; you shall not even touch them till you consent to do what poor justice can yet be done ! " said Blood. " Turn those tears to a gracious account, and save your own soul as well as mine."

" Where is this son of mine, then ? " said the countess, eagerly. " Give me the papers ; what must I do for him ? " Her eye met Blood's, which dwelt upon her with profound and searching earnestness.

" It will not do ; it is all in vain : you are still athirst for his blood ! " exclaimed the colonel. " Ho, Lord Aumerle—witnesses ! it is time."

As he spoke these words a considerable uproar overhead was heard, and a voice shouted at the trap-door above, " Here they are—here they are ! " and the gleam of a partisan appeared above. At the same time Mervyn and Lord Cavendish rushed out, and Blood, rising vehemently in his bed, yelled, " Seize her, seize her ! you have heard her confession ; I accuse her of murder ; seize her ! "

" Dost thou hear, murderess of my father ! " exclaimed Mervyn, clutching the countess's robe, who had started up and stood fixed in a magnificent attitude of horror. His touch seemed to break her paralysis of surprise, and uttering a thrilling shriek, she sprang towards the door—the well-door ! and forgetting the narrowness of the passage over it,

rushed out. A moment, and they heard an exclamation of inexpressible horror—then a struggle—then a hollow dash. At the same moment the room was crowded with soldiers, headed by Lord Howard and Sir Philip Lloyd.

"What woman is that—where is she gone?" exclaimed Howard, wildly. "Master Mervyn, you are my prisoner in the King's name!"

"It is Lady Howard; she must needs be dashed to pieces," said Lord Cavendish, as Mervyn, breaking loose from his grasp, rushed to the well. All followed, even Blood, lately so powerless on his bed of death. Mervyn threw his torch down the dark depths, but the light was soon lost in its profound gloom.

"A rope, a rope! she cannot, she shall not die thus," exclaimed Mervyn.

"Here is one, but it is not long enough," exclaimed Tom Hunt, "and there is water at the bottom."

"Hark, she groans; help, help me!" exclaimed Mervyn, and rushing to the bed, he tore its massive counterpane into strips. The rest, understanding his desperate purpose, aided. The work was complete in a few minutes, fastened to the rope, and securely knotted to the roller above the well, and though Cavendish sought to dissuade him, Mervyn eagerly descended, clinging and swinging over a fearful depth.

Cavendish hung the torch as far as possible down after him, but soon the light grew misty, the voices above indistinct, and it seemed as if a black fog surrounded him. Still he descended. His next sensation was that of intolerable stench, and a burning heat in the hand, caused no doubt by friction with the rope. A difficulty of breathing, increased darkness, and a singing noise in the ear, were successive perceptions; he began to feel giddy, and a dread assailed him that he was about to swoon and abandon his hold. Suddenly he felt the last notch of his rope, to which he had fastened the plank as a kind of resting-place in his descent. Not knowing what depth remained, he concluded that any further effort was in vain, but he extended his arms groping wildly about, and striving to shout for light, but his voice was inarticulate. His lowered himself to a sitting position on the plank, and bent desperately down, gasping and almost stifled as he was for breath. Suddenly he grasped something which appeared to him either like hair or weeds,

and at this moment, Cavendish sent down a lamp which fell hissing in the mud, but it gave him sufficient light to see that Lady Howard lay buried in the filth, and that she was gasping convulsively. His strength was now almost exhausted, but this sight seemed to restore it all. Observing a projecting piece of stone, lower down, he leaped upon it, and was thus obliged to abandon his hold of the rope, which flew loosely up, and probably mistaking it for a signal, those above began to roll it up. Knowing that all attempts to make them hear would be in vain, he seized the countess by her mantle, dragged her from the mud, and giving a supernatural leap, regained his seat on the plank.

Mervyn knew not whether the countess was alive or dead, but she hung motionless on his arm, and it was only by twisting it in some strange manner in the rope, that he was enabled to support the terrible burden. He felt that the limb stretched severely; it seemed as if tearing out by the joint. They hung wavering over the abyss, but still they were rapidly rising; if he could only endure the agony a little longer both were safe. He could not shout, for he felt that suffocation must ensue; his eyes and ears seemed bursting with some heavy weight; a deadly sickness seemed to deprive his heart of motion; his head sank back, his arms failed, and his reason tottered. Suddenly the burden seemed lightened as if by miracle, though he felt that it was still on his arm, but clinging air-like; again some wonderful support seemed to raise up his own sinking frame, and then all grew bright, and numerous faces seemed straining down upon him. In a few moments he was on a level with the margin, and many arms stretched out to help him land. He now perceived that Hunt had procured a boat-hook by which he helped him up.

Howard, Cavendish, and Sir Philip carried the wretched woman to Colonel Blood's bed, where they attempted for some time in vain, to restore her; she seemed suffering under some severe internal injury, and her lips bubbled continually with gore; but at length she opened her eyes, and with a shriek of superhuman agony, made signs that she was suffocating, and desired to be raised. Mervyn, who stood beside the pillow, raised her, and as he did so, she continued to look at him with a wild and most piteous gaze, and at length murmured, in a tone which went to the heart of all present, "My son!"

"Eleanor—Lady Howard—*I* am here," said Howard, advancing eagerly.

"Howard—Howard!—'tis Aumerle's son and mine!" she murmured, pausingly. "All ye around—I acknowledge him! Oh, my son—my Mervyn! Oh, that I could have thought this years ago."

"Son or no son, he is my prisoner; he hath escaped from the King's prison of the Tower," said Howard, desperately. "Sir Philip, I call upon you to arrest him."

"On your peril, Sir Philip—he hath his pardon!" exclaimed Blood, staggering up and falling at his length on the floor.

"It is true," said Sir Philip, after carefully examining the parchment which Mervyn handed to him. "And, my Lord Howard, I do think it becomes you to think of other matters when your countess lies thus."

"Pardoned!" repeated Howard, aghast.

"Pardoned, it is true," said Lady Howard, gaspingly; "but oh, at what a fearful price! Mervyn, she is in the King's power—Aurora!"

"Not if Elkanah's poison tells as truly as on me," said Blood, with a deep groan.

"Oh, then the measure of my crimes is complete! Howard, do you desert me even in death?" exclaimed the unhappy countess, making a convulsive effort to rise; and, sinking shudderingly back as Howard turned away with bitter scorn, she exclaimed, "Oh, Heaven have mercy on my soul!" and fell struggling on her pillow in the agonies of death.

The painful scene was soon over, and just as a surgeon, hastily summoned, entered, the spirit had fled from its lacerated flesh.

A brief examination satisfied the mediciner of this fact, and Howard seemed then to be touched with the fate of his unfortunate and guilty countess. He wept profusely, and directed her remains to be immediately carried to Aumerle House, an office which was principally performed by Sir Philip Lloyd's soldiers; and he himself, without taking any further notice of Mervyn, followed. The surgeon was about to follow, when Blood, who had now crawled to an arm-chair, where he lay groaning miserably, called him back.

"I can't bear this any longer, doctor!" he yelled. "I

am bursting all over, and still this cursed skin won't split and let out the boiling blood. Give me something for ease—what you will—a bowl of laudanum, doctor! I'll give you a guinea for every drop."

"You are dying of the plague, sir," exclaimed the horrified mediciner. "It is the black plague of Italy, and a goblet of the purest wine would be as mortal to you as the strongest poison."

"Say you so, Master Galen?" exclaimed Blood, eagerly. "Tom, bring me a glass of brandy, camarado, for old acquaintance' sake; I feel it will do me good now."

Hunt, with tears in his eyes, brought a tumbler, and as no one offered any objection, he filled it to the brim, and handed it to Blood. "That's a right lad," said the colonel, kindly. "Thou at least wilt miss a friend when I am gone, Tom—but never hang thy dewlaps, man. Had I lived thou shouldst not have lacked a coffin when they hanged thee. Here, gentlemen, wish me a good voyage. I am at the stirrup-cup!—Master Mervyn, can you not forgive me?"

"For what you have done against myself, I can and do, unhappy wretch!" said Mervyn.

"Then return to the Tower, and my life on't—ha, ha, my life!—Mistress Sydney is safe there, or dead," said Blood; then, slightly flavouring the brandy on his lips, he added, "It is real Nantzic, Tom. Think you not, Master Aumerle, that centuries of penal fires—but what's the use of thinking? He who made us all will do what He likes with us, good or bad—inflict what suffering He will, yea, for all eternity—and we must endure it, for He is the master, and hath the power to inflict." Then, taking the cup in his swollen hands, he swallowed the brandy to its dregs. The effect was immediate, and yelling out that he was on fire, he sprang up, and dashed about the room in a paroxysm of agony. Dreading that he intended to throw himself into the well, Cavendish stationed himself there, while Mervyn endeavoured to soothe him into bed. But it was all in vain, until his raging and fury exhausted him, when he sunk senseless on the floor.

"Let us leave this charnel-house—I will take charge of these papers—it is time we were with Sydney," said Lord Cavendish, hurriedly; and, in fact, the morning light began to break on the gloomy scene.

Mervyn readily complied, Hunt and Parrot promising to witness the last moments of their old leader, and with a sensation of extreme relief, they found themselves in the fresh air once more.

CHAPTER LXII

A MARRIAGE, AN EXECUTION, AND A FINIS

THE two friends returned to the Tower, and early as it was, the guards readily admitted them to their lieutenant's orders. They found Sydney with the Earl of Leicester, but, as he looked more composed, Mervyn ventured to hope he had heard good news. Sydney replied, with a melancholy smile, that Sir John had been to inform him that his execution was ordered for that day, but that his brother could learn nothing of Aurora except that she had left Aumerle House in the morning with Lady Howard, and neither of them had returned. He endeavoured to conclude from these scanty premises, that she had escaped ; but suddenly struck with the wild and haggard look of Mervyn, he hurriedly inquired what had happened. Cavendish briefly narrated the terrible scene of the night, to which Sydney listened with extreme interest ; but it seemed as if he clung principally to Blood's wild statements about his daughter. He embraced the young earl, nevertheless, with much affection, and seemed to congratulate him, but emotion choked his utterance.

At this moment a tapping was heard at the door, and Sir John Robinson himself appeared, ceremoniously escorting an old man, and a female wrapped in a large black cloak. All rose in evident surprise.

" Trouble yourselves not, gentlemen," said the old man. " I trust I shall not prove an unwelcome visitor, being so fairly attended. I am John of Oliva, whom methinks you know, Colonel Sydney ?—Lady, by your leave."

And drawing back her hood, he revealed the beautiful but very ghastly features of Aurora Sydney. A faint smile played upon her lips, which died away under the severe and protracted gaze of Sydney.

"Father! dearest father! do you not know me?" she said, almost inaudibly, but for the deep stillness around.

"Prithee, who are you?" replied Sydney, with a look of such extreme agitation that his whole soul seemed shaken.

"I will tell you, sir," said Oliva, taking her hand encouragingly. "She is the purest and most virtuous of maidens, wanting nothing but the holiness of death to fit her for the white-robed company of virgin-martyrs! Listen to me—I will exonerate her of every offence but what an angel might have done and never dimmed his amaranth."

The Jesuit looked at Sir John, who took the hint, and immediately retired. He then related those particulars with which the reader is already acquainted. Aurora had but just awoke from her trance, and in obedience to her passionate request, he had brought her to the Tower.

"My child—my own child—thy angel mother's true daughter!—this moment is dearer to me than a million years of such life as thy dishonour could have purchased," exclaimed Sydney, clutching her to his breast. "Good monk, I forgive the human motives that may have mingled with this heavenly deed of thine. Your party needs my blood, and so does my cause!"

"Oh, my father, and must you die?" wept Aurora. "It is not yet too late—leave not thy curse upon me, and I can yet—yet save you!"

"What wouldst thou preserve at such fathomless infamy, my child?" said Sydney, tenderly. "My life! a life which nature will soon demand as a just debt? Would you deprive me of the eternal glory of dying for the great English people, to linger on a few short years of painful age? No, my true child; old and running to the lees as is my life, I would have poured the dregs out with mine own hand so preserved. I must die, sweet innocent. My blood is needed; it will fertilise the noble oak of English liberty to bloom for everlasting ages. Were my native land but a poor sterile rock—unknown to fame and never to be known—still I would have died cheerfully in her cause; but for my England, my mighty land, destined to extend her vast arms over half the earth, the mother of nations, oh! who so base as to refuse a million lives to her need? And to the latest age, to the latest hour of recorded time, shall Sydney's name be dear to this vast people—known, loved, reverenced—as far as the ocean spreads which they shall rule."

Aurora continued to weep, but she seemed to lack strength to speak, and Sydney repeatedly kissed her brow with passionate grief. But some pleasant and soothing idea seemed suddenly to beam on his agitated soul.

"Thou hast it at least in thy power to make my death happy," he said. "Good monk, perfect your work—marry this youth and maiden, with the dying blessing of their father. Let me live to see them wedded, as I have secretly hoped I should."

"Brother Algernon, to whom would you wed my niece," exclaimed the Earl of Leicester.

"To the son of my earliest and dearest friend, Earl Aumerle," replied Sydney. "And if he were a beggar's son, Nature enrols him among her greatest nobles! Will you pleasure a dying man, father?"

"Wed Mervyn, now, my father?"

"Mourn me as long as Nature prescribes, my child, but give me this consolation in death," said Sydney, gently. "Let Mervyn regard you but as a dear sister till circumstances allow of a more open and splendid marriage. My brother, Leicester, hath sworn to protect you with his life. At Penshurst, surrounded by a powerful family—by the phantoms of your murdered friends—you are secure. Mervyn's life, as England now stands, cannot be safe within its confines; let him to the court of the Prince of Orange, with a letter from me, who am not without honour in that sovereign's sight. Then, when time hath turned the sharp edge of your grief, and he hath won such means as may keep you both from poverty, let him return and claim his bride, with Heaven's sanction and mine. I have nought to leave you, children, but my blessing: the rest is confiscate to the tyrant—but better days are coming. Again I tell you, the blood of patriots quenches not, but feeds the sacred fire of liberty."

"Give me a right to die for you, dearest Aurora," said Mervyn, with deep and mournful tenderness.

"Heaven approves, my child, and I am willing to perform my part," said Oliva.

"Lady, give not way to weak scruples," said Lord Cavendish. "This is all that can now sweeten the draught of death to your noble father."

"But your life—your life, my father," sobbed the unhappy lady. "Oh, must I carry to the grave the bitter

thought that I might have saved you, and did not ? "

" It is not so ; I know it was never intended to save Sydney's life," exclaimed the Jesuit. " At the council which the King left you to attend, York wrung from him the signature to your father's death-warrant."

Aurora made no further scruples, but never was there so sad a wedding. Pale and almost insensible, she stood by the man to whom she was about to plight her faith in the presence of that father on whom the scythe of death was about to descend. Mervyn was obliged to support her trembling frame during the ceremony, though he himself was so agitated as scarcely to falter forth the responses. Sydney, however, rested not till the link was riveted, and all he held dear on earth was confided to the brave and honest heart, whose aspirations after the great and good he had himself directed from early manhood. Oliva never went without his breviary, and they lacked nothing but a plain ring, which Sydney procured by breaking the diamond out of one which he wore. The ceremony was soon completed, and Oliva blessed the bridal pair with pious fervour as they knelt to receive the closing benediction. Sydney raised his daughter in his arms, kissed her affectionately, and said as he placed her hand in Mervyn's.

" Be happy, my children. I have repaid you, Mervyn, for all the generous valour and love you have shown for me. I give you here my soul's last and choicest treasure ! " Then, seeming to recollect something, he added placidly, " It is not till to-morrow ; but I need some little pause to recollect myself. You shall return to me at noonday."

" Oh, let me stay with you, my father ! " said Aurora. " I have a thousand things to say—a thousand forgivenesses to ask. You were always so good, so kind, so tender to my faults, and I have caused you so many sorrows."

" Never one, my darling child," said Sydney, fondly.

" Oh, but I might have loved you more—have pleased you more, had I foreseen this moment ; I could have made your life so much happier," wept poor Aurora.

" No, my daughter," said Sydney, strongly affected ; " no, not on earth ! Go with your uncle, and whenever we meet again, be but as pure, as good, as gentle, as now that we part ; and I am persuaded, in the infinite mercy of my

God, we shall meet again in a realm where neither sorrow, nor sin, nor death, nor terror shall ever come."

There was something so inexpressibly sad in these parting words, that it seemed as if Aurora comprehended that that long lingering look of love was the last, and she sank insensible into her father's outstretched arms.

"Take her away now—to your wife, Leicester; it will spare me much pain," said Sydney; and the earl and Lord Cavendish removed the senseless bride.

"If, Colonel Sydney, you need any spiritual assistance ——" began Oliva, meekly; but Sydney interrupted him.

"Nay, I will not give my long life the lie at last. Sydney and his good cause need no intercessors with Heaven. I regard the Deity as the sole judge between Himself and His creature. I regard religion as a Divine essence, and place no reliance on exterior forms."

"Sydney, you are a great and a good man, and posterity will call you so," said Oliva, extending his hand. "Which of us is right I know not, but I would die in my cause, as you die in yours."

They wrung each other's hands in silence, and parted for ever. Sydney retired to dress himself for the scaffold, and the brief conversation which ensued between Mervyn and his early protector was broken by the entrance of a number of gentlemen anxious to pay their respects to the departing patriot. Oliva then retired, with an assurance to Mervyn that he would look to his welfare.

Sydney reappeared very soon, in a suit of black velvet, serene and dignified, as if it were merely an ordinary meeting of his friends. His brother now returned, and announced that Aurora was still insensible, and was in the care of his wife.

"Well, brother Philip, you will be good to her?" said Sydney. "Let us forgive and forget our foolish lawsuit, and only recollect that we had one mother, and that in our youth we have bled together in the same great cause. Shed no tear, brother, for I die very happy, save for my poor child. Come, let us embrace; you recollect how our ancient father blessed us both when he was dying—he and our mother will be glad, even in heaven, to hear that we parted as good friends as they left us."

The brothers again embraced, and Leicester sobbed audibly.

"Your daughter, Algernon," he said, "shall be as dear to me as mine own—I swear it, by our mother's memory."

"Come, gentlemen, I will drink to your good health, and our happy meeting at some future day," exclaimed Sydney. "Bring wine, warder, and of a better quality than that you gave me to supper. Ducas," he added, turning to the faithful steward, whose bleared eyes showed his sorrow, "bring me my papers, and the copies you have made. This, in my own writing, I give to you, my dear son, Aumerle, with this letter, which I desire you to convey to his highness the Prince of Orange. This copy I leave with you, brother Leicester; and this I intend to give the sheriffs on the scaffold: but I doubt they will find it convenient to suppress it, as far as in them lies."

"You do not think to address the people, then, brother?" said Leicester. "It shall be well, for complaint and upbraidings will but further irritate your enemies."

"'Tis not for that, Philip," said Sydney, emphatically; "but that I fear to rouse the poorer sort, who will be there to weep for me, to some outrageous act which will but bathe the streets in blood, and not wash out the stain of tyranny. Moreover, mine age, and the rigorous season, might prove impediments to my being heard; so I will leave my appeal to a tongue which neither kings nor crowds can silence. And I trust the time will come in England when no man shall be afraid to be of my hearers. I drink to all your good estates," he said, solemnly; "and to our happy reunion, gentlemen."

All drank the toast in silence, except Mervyn, whose lips trembled so that he dared not trust the wine to them.

"Drink, my son," said Sydney, cheerfully. "This is the last glass we shall ever drink together. Do not forget me, nor the cause for which I suffer. Gentlemen, I pray you remark, I die at peace with all men, and as far as my personal feelings are concerned, even with those who have wronged my country of her liberties."

A warder now entered and whispered to Sir John, who, apologising for the interruption, informed Sydney that the sheriffs of London had sent in to demand his body.

"I deny that they are the sheriffs of London; their election was in violation of the city charters," said Sydney, warmly. "But let it be—they shall have what of me remains. I am ready."

" Tell their honours to step up—I must have a receipt for my prisoner," said Sir John. The sheriffs accordingly made their appearance, in full costume, bowing with ceremonious respect to their destined prey, and to the company.

" Master sheriffs," Sydney said, with great calmness, " I will not quarrel with your errand on mine own account, for the world is now nothing to me ; but I would entreat you, for your own sakes, to consider what heavy guilt you have incurred, in not returning a fair jury, but one packed by the solicitors for the crown."

" See," whispered Cavendish to Lord Leicester, " see how, like the good thief, one of them relents, and tears stream down his heavy visage."

The sheriffs and Sir John signed a mutual release, and the preparations being complete, Sydney was informed that all was ready. He seemed in no wise troubled, but shook hands with the warders who had waited on him, made each a present, and informed the lieutenant that he too was ready.

The procession then formed which was to escort the prisoner to the scaffold. A guard headed it, and the lieutenant, Mervyn, and the other gentlemen surrounding Sydney, they descended to the courtyard. A smile lighted the prisoner's noble countenance when he saw how brightly the sun was shining, and what masses of anxious faces were around. There was a light sprinkle of snow on the ground, and the roofs glittered with a hoar frost.

They reached the outer gate of the fortress, where the sheriffs' coaches waited, but Sydney declared he would rather walk the short distance which remained to the scaffold, and as the way was densely lined with soldiers, no objection was made. The people could not even catch a glimpse of him as he came, though from the extraordinary flutter and excitement they were aware that he had left the Tower. The scaffold was visible all the way as they went, on the point where Tower Hill debouches into the great esplanade of the fortress. It was hung with black cloth, and guarded by a great body of horsemen.

When they reached the stairs ascending to the scaffold, Sydney paused for a moment to bid his friends farewell. He desired that no one should accompany him up but Mervyn and two of his servants, shook hands with all, and embraced his brother affectionately. He then with un-

altered composure mounted the scaffold, leaning on Mervyn's shoulder.

When once his appearance was manifest to the vast masses assembled, there was a general and tremendous shout of "Sydney!" and then a silence so profound and extraordinary that the sheriffs turned pale, and looked at each other in great alarm. Sydney bowed, and glanced with a calm, undismayed eye over the vast assemblage. The wide space surrounding the Tower ditch was densely packed with spectators, the numerous streets which verged into it, every window, every roof, even the ramparts of the fortress, were black with gazers. The sentinels even paused, leaning on their glittering partisans over the battlements, but the fortress was decked out in banderols and flags, as if for some general festival.

"It is only the dungeons of England that are glad to-day," said Sydney, with a calm smile. "Behold! here is the great English people present; this generation of men will tell the tale to their children, and they to theirs, and my name shall be eternal as the English tongue to utter it, and in many a region of which we dream not yet."

"It will be blessed as long as Jeffreys is cursed," said Mervyn, with enthusiasm.

"They expect a speech from me, it seems, and I have none to make them," said Sydney. "Good people, I have made my peace with God. I come not hither to make a speech, but to die. Here, master sheriffs, I desire you to take charge of this paper, which contains all the last words I intend to make. I desire not to read it, nor to have it read to the multitude, for I am no mutiny-stirrer. Look not so dejected, son," he said, cheerfully clapping Mervyn on the shoulder. "I am going to a better place than I leave you in, and I die in as good and great a cause as ever was, though for a time it seems unfortunate, and for which I bled in my youth, when my veins flowed not so laggardly. Be kind to my poor orphan, Mervyn. My last words are a blessing on you both. And at some future day," he added, with an affectionate smile, "tell her I desired your heir might be called Algernon Sydney. And now farewell day and night, and joy and trouble, and welcome eternal peace. I do trust my country will not forget me; and if a brighter day should come, this elevated spot on which they have raised my scaffold may, perchance, prove the basis of a

statue to my memory. But no, in a land which hath not raised a temple to the memory of Alfred, Sydney may well lack even a grave-stone."

Mervyn was too much affected to reply, and Sydney asked for the executioner, who advanced with a familiar bow, touching the top of his black mask in respect.

"I desire you will not hack me as you did my Lord Russell, sir," said Sydney. "Here are three guineas for you—what, is that not enough for taking off an old head like mine! Give him three more, Ducas, if he does it cleverly. Prithee, let me feel your axe."

The executioner raised the axe, and Sydney felt the edge, and seemed satisfied that it was sharp enough.

"Let not my daughter see my corpse," said Sydney, earnestly. "You will bury me at Penshurst, Mervyn, as near my father and mother as may be, and privately, though I forbid no man to weep that hath tears, in such a cause. It will be about sunset to-morrow when you go up the old avenue of oaks to Penshurst; I pray you remember then, as you pass it, that perched high in the branches of that hollow oak, which is the last, it was my boyhood's delight to study old Plutarch's characters. I trust my death will not disgrace him whom I chose as my model even then—Marcus Brutus!"

"Here are forty thousand spectators, and your honour alone seems unconcerned," sobbed Ducas.

"Would you have me die worse than common wretches, who daily outbrave death for picking a pocket?" said Sydney.

"Are you ready, sir?" exclaimed one of the sheriffs. "If you are, I must indeed tell you, Mr. Sydney, that it would become your great quality and Christian demeanour, to tell the people that you acknowledge the justice of your death, and desire forgiveness."

"I die for my country, and the last act of my life shall not give the lie to the rest!" said Sydney, with a slightly scornful smile.

"Then, sir, the clock has passed our time," said the sheriff, abruptly.

"I think so, too," replied Sydney, calmly. "Are you ready, friend, with the axe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And so am I. And now, farewell, Mervyn, till we meet

above ! " said Sydney, turning to his young disciple. They embraced, and the mob, who perceived that the moment of execution had arrived, uttered faint cries and sobs, while women shrieked and swooned, and it seemed as if that vast mob were joining in one loud and general lamentation, though Sydney's stern character had prevented him from ever being the popular idol. He bowed, and a gleam of satisfaction, brighter than a smile, came over his face. His servants then stripped off his doublet and cravat, and opened the neck of his shirt. He then knelt conveniently at the block, and for a few brief moments seemed absorbed in solemn prayer. After this he wrung Mervyn's hand once more, and observing that he was speechless with grief, murmured in a low voice, " Give my love to Aury ; tell her, if my soul be eternal, that love will be so too ! " And he laid his head on the block.

" Will you rise again, sir ? " said the executioner, lifting his axe, and almost grazing the neck in levelling his aim.

" Not till the general resurrection ; strike on ! " was the reply, and instantaneously the axe rose, glittered, fell, and the severed head rolled on the scaffold. The executioner instantly clutched it up by the long fair hair, and held it up at the four corners of the scaffold, exclaiming, " BEHOLD THE HEAD OF A TRAITOR ! " to each of which asseverations Mervyn replied in a loud voice, " No ! "

That " No " has been echoed by posterity.

Sydney's funeral took place next day at Penshurst, and at that sad ceremony did Mervyn and his youthful wife meet again, but only to part. Bowed down with grief and anguish as she was, even the consolation of his presence was denied her ; information arrived from Oliva that it was the intention of the now despotic government to seize him again ; there was no resource but flight, and he fled to Holland.

The fame of his extraordinary adventures, and Sydney's letter, recommended him to the notice of the Prince of Orange, although without any public demonstration. His perfect acquaintance with the plots and plotters, and all the broken skeins of the popular part which William of Orange was anxious to knit up in his own hand, rendered him almost invaluable to that prince. His advice was eagerly sought, and Mervyn, who had now transferred his allegiance from

his King to his country, thought it no treason to encourage the ambitious visions of the Dutch prince. Meanwhile the Earl of Leicester, at his own cost and expense, commenced formal proceedings in the House of Lords for the restoration of Mervyn's title and estates, which Howard had now seized and rioted in. But he met with continued and most vexatious delays on the part of the Chancellor, Jeffreys, and though the validity of the young earl's claim was not resisted, it remained a dead letter in consequence.

With all his favour at the court of the Hague, it is not impossible that Mervyn might have starved there, as the economical prince never took it into his royal head that a banished fugitive must be in want of everything. But the thoughtful love of his young wife supplied this deficiency; she sent him all her jewels, with an affectionate assurance that he was to consider it only as a loan, till more prosperous times enabled him to repay her with interest.

Shortly after, he was relieved from a still greater uneasiness by the death of Charles II., who departed suddenly, either by poison or apoplexy. Oliva's influence over the mind of his successor was unlimited, and, under pretext of producing him as evidence against Oates, who was now indicted for perjury, he obtained Mervyn permission to return to London.

Mervyn's evidence was that which brought the wretch to his condign punishment: he it was who proved that, at the time when Oates swore he had been at the consult of the Jesuits held in London, he was at St. Omer, and he horrified the court with a detail of his monstrous crimes. The lawyers, however, contented themselves with their own indictment, for there was only one witness to the other facts; and Mervyn had the satisfaction of hearing that sentence pronounced, which, tremendous as it was, seemed weak and impotent compared to the criminal's offences:— A fine of one hundred thousand pounds, public and annual exposure on the pillory, to be whipped by the hangman from Newgate to Tyburn, and perpetual imprisonment! This sentence, pronounced with infinite gusto by Jeffreys, is almost the only one of the hundreds he gave in his time which posterity has applauded, as did the crowded court which heard it delivered.

From London, Mervyn flew on the wings of love to Penshurst, where Leicester resided in retirement. How he

was received—with what passionate joy, by the beautiful orphan who had but him left in the world to love—must be imagined, not described. The gay and imaginative girl had ripened into the calm and thoughtful woman, and her beauty had acquired a still more touching interest from the serene and gentle melancholy which shaded its lustre.

Jeffreys no longer offered his delays to Mervyn's suit, and judgment was pronounced in his favour ; and necessary measures to eject Howard were in forwardness, and Mervyn awaiting the assemblage of Parliament to take his seat, after which his nuptials were to be publicly solemnised with Aurora, when suddenly the insurrection of Monmouth alarmed all England. Without the least shadow of pretext, the government of James II. thought proper to suspect Mervyn of a share in this new conspiracy ; and to avoid incarceration, he again fled to Holland.

The world was greatly changed there also. The Prince of Orange immediately confided the command of his guards to the young earl, and he was one of the principal movers of that grand revolution which shattered the tyrannous throne of the Stuarts.

After that great event, honours, riches, and fame were showered upon him. He was restored to all his rights, and the illustrious titles of his ancient house ; wedded, with a pomp which outshone all but royal nuptials, to the beautiful daughter of Sydney ; and lived to a good old age, in the enjoyment of every earthly happiness ; dying, as the great monument in Mervyn Abbey records, at the age of eighty-three years—surviving his wife, Aurora Sydney, only six months. According to the same inscription, he died a Knight of the Garter and Constable of the Tower, leaving a numerous issue, the eldest of whom, " Algernon Sydney d'Aumerle," was created a peer in his father's lifetime, as head of the deputation which carried the news of his accession to George I. The same vault also contains the body of the murdered Lord Aumerle, transported thither from the Tower with great funeral pomp and honours ; and at his feet was laid another coffin, without inscription, but which a constant tradition ascribes as the last dwelling-place of Claude Duval.

There are a variety of memoranda still preserved in the Aumerle family, written by the earl, which may, perhaps, interest such readers as have taken an interest in the minor

personages of our chronicle. After taking a review of the principal events of his stormy youth, and thanking God that, at the age of eighty-two, he still preserved his dear wife, and all his senses in great vigour, the earl proceeds—"And now, indeed, it doth something startle me, looking back at those times, to remember that I am, as it were, the last oak of a noble forest, standing bare and alone, that was once surrounded by the verdure of a thousand contemporaries. The woodsman, Death, hath spared scarcely one; and of all the actors in the fearful drama of my youth, not, indeed, one. Charles II., James II., William of Nassau, and Mary his queen, Anna of York, in succession my sovereigns, have passed into the tomb, and (which, indeed, something troubles me) a prince who cannot speak English sits on the throne of Alfred; of the Whigs, as they are now commonly called, Shaftesbury died in his bed, Lord Russell, my father, Sydney (whose attainders were reversed as soon as we had King William on the throne), and the Duke of Monmouth, were beheaded; my Lord Essex died in the Tower; Howard of Eskricke perished in great misery of poverty and desertion; my Lord Argyle was beheaded at Edinburgh. Of the court party, that most infamous judge and chancellor, Jeffreys, was nigh torn to pieces by a mob, and died miserably in the Tower; Colonel Blood expired in great agonies a few days after that dreadful scene in Whitefriars, wherein my unhappy mother perished; the wretch who poisoned him, I found his skeleton many years after, when, being constable of the Tower, I caused the subterraneous passage to be mortared and stone-choaked. As for Master Chiffinch, he followed King James to France, and I never heard any more of him; Mrs. Creswold, I am told, died a most horrible death in prison. As to that most abominable of all wretches, Titus Oates, he survived his severe flaying, and was released at the revolution, but I did hear from many hands that the remnant of his years were so lashed by the whips of conscience, that he enjoyed no peace on earth, and left it at last in hideous despair."

THE END

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